



OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

NO. 52

Price 5 cents

A CONSPIRACY OF CRIME



The
ARTHUR WESTBROOK
Company
CLEVELAND,
U. S. A.

by
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SLEUTH"



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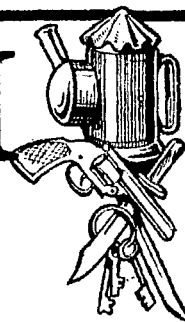


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A Series of
**THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES
EVER PUBLISHED**

No. 52.

THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A.

Vol. I.

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A CONSPIRACY OF CRIME

OR

FOILING THE KIDNAPPERS

By

"OLD SLEUTH."

CHAPTER I.

"Of all the mysteries I have ever encountered, this promises to be the strangest!"

The exclamation above quoted fell from the lips of Tom Silver—a western man who had distinguished himself as a government detective, and who, later on, had been assigned to New York as a secret special. Tom Silver had not been very long in the great metropolis before he had earned the pseudonym of Silver Tom, and the appellation well fitted him, as in appearance and demeanor he was one of the most gentlemanly officers on the force, and it was his pleasant and agreeable manners that had won for him the sobriquet.

It was a mystery to old-timers that Tom Silver should have adopted the profession of detective, as in appearance he looked less like a thief-trailer than any man ever known in the fraternity; but appearances are said to be very deceptive, and in our hero's case they were singularly so, as beneath that head crowned with curly blonde hair lay a brain of great power, and beaming from those clear, blue eyes was a spirit of indomitable courage. He possessed a slender and graceful form, and yet his muscles were a combination of whip-cords, and taking him all in all, with his strength and agility, he was really one of the most formidable men on the force to handle, and his effeminate looks, seemingly delicate frame, and pleasant manners were great aids in his profession, as they enabled him to go under many covers and assume disguises that men cast in a rougher mold would not dare assume.

At the moment Tom Silver muttered the words with which we open our strange narrative, he was stepping off the stoop of a handsome residence located in one of the most fashionable quarters of the great city of New York.

About three months previous to the opening of our narrative, and shortly after Tom's first appearance in New York, he had met with a very singular adventure. He had just left the

chief's office one day when he was accosted by a female heavily veiled, and the lady had said to him:

"You are a detective?"

"I am," was Tom's answer.

"Can I converse with you a few moments?"

"On business, madame?"

"Certainly."

"I am at your service."

"Will you dine with me, sir?"

"Why should I, madame?"

"Because I have a long story to tell, and we can not stand upon the street without attracting attention."

"You really desire to talk with me upon a matter of business?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you shall go to dinner with me."

"No; my invitation was given first, and I shall exact one condition. You are not to seek to see my face."

"It is against our rules, madame, to talk with a stranger."

"I only seek advice, sir, and I will pay you for your time."

"I do not take pay unless I perform a service, and upon this occasion I will break our usual rule, and not insist upon seeing your face."

"Thank you, sir."

The two proceeded a few steps, and the lady said:

"You may know of some place where we can dine and talk without attracting attention?"

"Right here," said the officer, and he led the way into a restaurant just opposite to where they had halted, and a few moments later they were sitting in a booth with oysters and tea in front of them, but neither appeared to betray a very ravenous appetite.

Tom Silver was a very cunning fellow. He had promised not to ask to see the lady's face, but he set to make a very close study of his strange visitor, and he reached the conclusion that the lady was disguised—that she was

young, although gray curls peeped from beneath her bonnet.

"I may meet her again," was the mental observation of the officer, and he studied every tone of her voice, and his habits of observation and analyzation enabled him to determine her exact height. He studied the size of her gloved hand, the build of her dainty foot. He made a record of every gesture, and after ten minutes in her company he made up his mind that he could identify her under any circumstances should he meet with her again.

It had taken years of study and practice to make him such a marvelous adept in noting indices, but we are safe in asserting that had he met the lady at a masked ball he would have placed her, though the meeting might occur months subsequent to the interview she was having at the time he made his observations.

"I have sought advice from a detective, sir, instead of a lawyer for reasons satisfactory to myself, and for which I do not feel really called upon to offer an explanation."

"That is your own affair, madame."

"I wish to ask you if it is larceny for a person to secretly regain possession of what rightfully belongs to him?"

"That is a question, madame, that may be answered in two ways. Morally it might be right to regain possession of your own property, but as to the legality of the method there is a question. What are the circumstances?"

"Suppose a man had been parted with an other man, and he had robbed the other man, and later on a relative of the robbed man should learn of the robbery, would that relative be justified in secretly possessing himself on account of the stolen property?"

"Morally he or she might be justified if absolutely assured of the facts, legally he or she would not be justified."

"How should the injured party proceed?"

"By legal proceedings."

"Legal proceedings require proofs."

"Yes."

"Suppose the wronged party possessed proofs satisfactory to himself or herself, but proofs that could not be made apparent to a jury?"

"If I were the party wronged I should right myself by the best methods presented; but I should make sure that I had been really wronged."

"Suppose you should be assured of your rights in the case, or should secure your rights through your own device, and suppose that later on you should be accused, could you come in afterward with your proofs to establish your rights in the matter?"

"You could; but the chances would be against you."

"The legal risks are great?"

"Yes."

"Morally the wronged party would be right?"

"I should say so."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir. How much shall I pay you?"

"You owe me nothing."

"Then I will bid you good-day. You may hear from me again, or you may not, but under any circumstance I thank you."

CHAPTER II.

True lady rose from her seat and hastily left the saloon. After first paying the check for the uneaten dinner, Tom sat a few moments thinking over the strange interview, and finally arose and sauntered from the place, with the remark: "Well, that was an odd experience, but I shall meet that woman again. This is but the opening chapter of a little intrigue."

Three months subsequent to the meeting with the veiled lady, Tom Silver received a note one day to call at a certain hour in the evening at the house of a gentleman who signed his name as Augustus Baker.

At the hour named our hero appeared in front of the house mentioned in the note he had received. As usual, he took an observation before entering the house, and when fully satisfied with having taken all the bearings, he ascended the stoop and rang the bell. A servant opened the door, and our hero handed the man a card; and a moment later the man returned and bid the officer enter, and, leading the way, the servant ushered the detective into a handsomely furnished library, where he was bid to wait a few moments.

Tom glanced around, and everything that fell under his gaze was suggestive of great wealth and refinement; and he was still making a study, when a gentleman of about five-and-thirty entered the room, with the greeting:

"Good-evening, Mr. Silver."

"Good-evening, sir," responded the officer, as he flashed a glance over the supposed master of the house.

And we will here say that the impression following the glance was not a pleasant one; but our hero was too old an observer to reach convictions at a mere glance.

The gentleman said:

"I am the writer of the note that summoned you here."

"You are Mr. Baker?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am at your service."

"I desire that all conversation between us shall be absolutely confidential."

"Certainly, sir."

"I wish still further to make a stipulation in case, with your aid, we discover and unmask a criminal: there shall follow no arrest unless at my suggestion."

"That is a strange stipulation, sir."

"Not when you understand the situation."

"I await information, sir."

"Suppose I am the injured party?"

"Well?"

"It certainly can rest with me whether or not I prosecute?"

"If no other person is involved I should say, sir, it would rest with you."

"In this case no one else can be involved, as it is a case of robbery, and I am the only sufferer."

"I should say, sir, under these circumstances you could prosecute or not, just as you chose."

"I may determine to prosecute, or I may determine to forgive in case the criminal is discovered."

"It will be your right, sir."

"And under any circumstances, the conditions being as I have presented them, I can rely upon your discretion and silence?"

"Yes, sir, if the conditions develop as you anticipate."

"Under any circumstances I alone can be the sufferer."

"I am at your service, sir."

"And our dealings will be confidential?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will not be compelled to make any report of the case?"

"Not necessarily, as I am a secret special."

"So I learned before I sent for you to come here; and now I will explain the case to you. One month ago I made an exchange of some property. It was a large piece of land with extensive improvements upon it. I received payment in United States bonds to the amount of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The certificates I brought to my house and deposited them overnight in my safe. During the night the safe was opened, and two hundred thousand dollars' worth of those bonds were stolen."

The detective opened his eyes, and there followed a moment's silence, broken at length by our hero, who asked:

"Did I understand you, that you placed two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in the safe?"

"Yes, sir."

"And two hundred thousand were taken, and fifty thousand left?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where was the safe located?"

"The safe was in the rear room. I sleep in the front room over the parlor. I reserve to myself the whole floor."

"And it was broken open?"

"No, sir; it was opened by some one who knew the combination."

"Who knew the combination besides yourself?"

"I was not aware until after the robbery of the bonds that any one did."

"Did any one in your house besides yourself know of the deposit of the bonds in the safe upon that night?"

"I did not know that they did; but it is evident that some one did."

"Some one in your house?"

"Yes."

"You suspect a certain party?"

"I can not say that I do."

"Could any one have come in from the street?"

"No, sir."

"Then in your opinion the thief was a dweller under your roof?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is your opinion that some one within your house committed the robbery?"

"Yes, sir."

"May I ask concerning the occupants of your house?"

"Yes, sir. I am a widower; I have three female servants in the lower part of my house; I have a male servant, the man who let you in at the door; I have two children, little girls of the age of nine and twelve; and there also resides with us their governess, a young lady who came to me with the very best recommendations."

"Those are all the dwellers in your house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any frequent visitors who would be likely to know your habits and the disposition of your valuables?"

"No, sir."

"Which one of your female servants do you suspect?"

"Neither of them."

"Nor the man?"

"No, sir. I am absolutely sure, from evidence in my possession, that my servants are guiltless."

"Have you made the robbery known?"

"No, sir."

"Of course you can not suspect your little girls?"

"No."

The two men gazed into each other's face, and there followed a silence.

CHAPTER III.

TOM SILVER thought over all the facts. He had received a good pointer, as detectives say, and, after his usual methods, he set out to have a hunt for little indices on his own account.

He did not say, as one would naturally sup-

pose he would under all the circumstances: "Well, the suspicion is narrowed down to the governess." No, no; Silver Tom went off on another tack. He skirmished a little.

"It's a strange affair," he remarked, "and it does not appear from your statement that any one in your house lies under suspicion?"

Mr. Baker gave a start, and looked puzzled.

"You do not think, sir, that any one under my roof lies under suspicion?"

"No one that you have named, sir."

"It was some one under my roof who stole those bonds."

"Is it not possible that you are the victim of a sneak thief?"

"No, sir; no one came from the outside to rob me."

"Where do you keep the key of your safe?"

"In my pocket."

"And was it in your pocket the morning after the robbery?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure you put the bonds in your safe?"

"Yes, sir; and I looked to see that they were safe the last thing before I retired."

"At what hour did you retire?"

"About twelve o'clock."

"Had you taken the bonds out to count them over?"

"No, sir."

"When did you deposit them in the safe?"

"It was about five o'clock in the afternoon."

"Had you just come in from the street?"

"Yes."

"And you went straight to your safe?"

"Yes."

"And put the bonds in there?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the last thing before you retired you looked to see if they were there?"

"Yes, sir."

"And in the morning?"

"I went straight to the safe and opened it, and the bonds were gone."

"That is, two hundred thousand dollars were gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the other fifty?"

"Remained in the safe."

"And you do not suspect any of your servants?"

"No, sir."

"Your children, of course, did not take them?"

"No, sir."

"And no one from outside entered your house and took them?"

"No, sir; of that I am sure."

"And your household consists of yourself, your female servants, the man-servant, your two children, and the governess?"

"Yes, sir."

The last "Yes, sir" was spoken quickly and eagerly.

"And you are sure, then, that the thief was and is a resident of your house?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"I can not see what need you have for my services."

"Why, sir?"

"It would appear that you have already located the thief."

"I have?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"On the principle of elimination. Some one in your house stole the bonds. Your household consists of yourself, your servants, your children, and the governess. You are positive your servants are guiltless; you are positive your children did not take them; and there remains only yourself and the governess—either of you two is the guilty party."

"Either of us?"

"Yes."

"I would not steal my own bonds."

"It is possible."

"It is possible?"

"Yes."

"Sir, you perplex me. Are you joking?"

"No, sir."

"Will you explain?"

"Certainly."

"Do so."

"Either you or the governess, according to the evidence at hand as you present it, stole those bonds."

"Will you explain, sir?"

"Certainly. I am explaining. Listen, sir

you came into the house and put those bonds in your safe. Your mind dwelt upon them all the evening. The last thing before you went to bed you looked to see if they were safe. You returned with the thought of those bonds pressing upon your mind—

The detective stopped short, and Mr. Baker said:

"Well, sir?"

"Yet you do not grasp my suspicion?"

"I do not."

"Is it not possible that in your sleep you arose, opened your safe, removed the bonds, and placed them somewhere else?"

"Your theory is a very ingenious one, and does you credit; but, sir, I did not arise in my sleep and remove those bonds."

"You are absolutely certain you did not?"

"I am."

"Have you searched for them?"

"I have."

"Did that idea then strike you before?"

"No."

"Why did you search?"

"I did so mechanically."

"Then not thoroughly?"

"Yes, very thoroughly."

"Had we not better make another search?"

"I have searched."

"But would it not be well for me to aid you? I am a professional searcher."

"We will not be able to find those bonds."

"You are absolutely certain?"

"I am."

"I can not see how you can be."

"I am."

"How can you know what you did in your sleep?"

"I did not remove those bonds in my sleep."

"You are determined to dismiss that possibility?"

"I am."

"Then you confess that you suspect the identity of the thief?"

"I am asking you, sir, whom you suspect?"

"My dear sir, I can suspect no one; but your statements centers suspicion upon the governess."

CHAPTER IV.

THERE followed a moment's meditation, and the silence was broken by Mr. Baker, who said:

"Does not suspicion point toward the party named?"

"I can not tell. I have not seen the lady. I know nothing as concerns her antecedents. I know of no facts that would point to her as the thief, save the statement that you suspect no one else in your house. Now, if I should see all the occupants of this house, and have an opportunity of watching them I might secure suggestions that would point suspicion in another direction."

"I desire that you shall see every one in my house, and I have arranged for you to do so. I have announced that I expect a gentleman friend to visit me from the South. I desire that you take up your abode here."

"When shall I come?"

"Why not remain to-night?"

"Are you prepared for me to remain here?"

"I am."

The detective thought a moment, and then asked:

"Have you described in any way the character of your expected guest?"

"No."

"You have merely announced that you expect a gentleman to stay with you?"

"Yes."

"You have not said whether the gentleman is young or old?"

"No."

"The governess knows that you expect this gentleman?"

"Yes."

"But no one in your house knows of your loss?"

"Not one."

"It is not even suspected?"

"No, sir."

"That is fortunate, and will permit a fair investigation on my part. I will go away and return in about an hour. I will come in a cab. I will bring a trunk with me. You will receive a telegram, and can announce that your friend has arrived in the city, and you expect I will come here. As an elderly man, I will pretend to be a professor in a southern college. You may as well mention that fact incidentally to the governess. I see you are a smart man. I need

not tell you to act your part well, and I will certainly so perform mine. I will see this young lady before I listen to your account of her."

"I was about to tell you why I suspect her."

"You need not do so until I call for the explanation."

"But I have not suspected her without cause."

"Oh! certainly not; but I have my own way of going about these investigations. Should I hear your story I would not be so well prepared to study the young lady—and may I ask her name?"

"Ruth Tabor."

"That is all I desire to know at present, and now I will go; in about an hour I will return."

"Do you think you will be able to solve the mystery?"

"I think I shall be successful."

The detective rose to go, and Mr. Baker led the way to show him out. They passed the parlor door; it was ajar, and there came the sound of a piano. The master of the house came to a halt, and said:

"Glance in."

The detective stepped to the door and did glance, and his eyes rested upon a beautiful young lady seated at the piano. He had a clear view of her profile. One glance electrified him. There came over him a feeling such as he had never before experienced. He would have lingered for a fuller view of that sweet, sad face, but Mr. Baker touched his arm. The two gentlemen walked to the front door, and Mr. Baker stepped into the vestibule and asked in a whisper:

"Well, what do you think?"

"I do not think yet."

"She is very beautiful."

"Yes."

"It will be hard for you to prove her a thief."

"That depends."

"I mean you will be very reluctant to do so."

"Not more so than any other case; a thief is a thief, whether beautiful or ugly in feature. You need not fear; I will do my duty. I will follow this mystery link by link until I arrive at the truth."

"That young lady is one of the deepest and most cunning creatures on the face of the earth. I know she is guilty, but you must prove her guilt."

"If she be guilty we may get along to facts in time that will establish her guilt."

"She is guilty."

The detective departed, and as he descended the stoop he uttered the words with which we open our narrative.

The detective said it was likely to prove a great mystery—one of the greatest he had ever encountered—and he had good reason for the belief, as already strange, weird suspicions had formed in his mind.

Our hero as he left the house walked along lost in deep thought, and upon reaching the corner he came to a halt for a moment to consider. He was looking around and revolving in his mind which way he should proceed, when he observed a veiled lady pass him. It was not an uncommon occurrence for a veiled lady to be passing along the street, but the detective's quick eye brought to him a revelation. He recognized something familiar about the veiled lady. It was only a vague idea that swept through his mind; but he started to follow the lady, and he had gone upon her track but a few moments when he exclaimed:

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

Our readers will remember that three months previously the detective had had a very strange interview with a veiled lady. Our readers will also remember that upon the occasion referred to he had noted certain peculiarities about the lady that would enable him to identify her should he meet with her again, and the revelation that came to him was the fact that the lady he was following was the very lady who had interviewed and had asked him the series of strange questions concerning the morality of a robbery under certain circumstances.

"It's strange," muttered the detective, "that I should meet this lady just at this time."

It was indeed strange under all the circumstances, as our readers will perceive. He had just heard of a mysterious robbery, and within the same half hour he met the mysterious woman, who, under a disguise and in a most unusual manner, had asked him about a robbery.

"By all that's odd and singular," he again muttered, "I'll speak to her."

Tom followed on, waiting for a good chance to address the mysterious woman. For within

the moment, putting all the incidents together, he had in some way connected the lady with the story he had heard but a short time previously.

"I am under no promise to-night," he muttered; "I will see her face. There is something about all this that borders on the weird. That woman has not come here through accident. There is something under all this."

The detective saw a favorable opportunity. He leaped forward and laid his hand on the lady's shoulder; the next moment he clapped his hands to his eyes—his sight had been destroyed!

CHAPTER V.

WE closed our preceding chapter with the statement that the detective's eyesight was destroyed. It was, but only momentarily. He had been made the victim of an old trick, and not looking for anything out of the way, he had been caught. He had, as stated, leaped forward and laid his hand upon the veiled lady's shoulder, and as he did so she turned on him quick as a flash, and with unerring accuracy of aim dashed a powder in his eyes. Instinctively he clapped his hands to his eyes, and the next instant reached forth to seize his assailant. She had slipped away. Being blinded he was helpless, but managed to clear his vision. When he succeeded, the woman was not in sight.

Tom looked around in every direction, but the veiled woman was nowhere in sight. He started to strike her trail, and he spent some minutes in seeking to do so, but she had as effectually disappeared as though she had vanished in thin air.

The detective was mortified, but the circumstances were such that he should have had no suspicion of such an attack. He walked on toward his lodgings lost in deep thought, and he reasoned that one of two facts explained the dose he had received. The woman had either recognized and was prepared to blind him, or else she was on her guard and prepared to assault any one who should seek to address her. One fact was assured: the mystery was deepening. The detective had already remarked that it promised to be the greatest mystery of his life, and already the incidents as they developed confirmed his declaration, for in his own mind he associated the veiled woman with the strange story of the robbery of the two hundred thousand dollars, and yet there were developments to come that would tend to mystify him to a much greater degree.

Tom reached his lodgings, and as he was an expert at disguises, he soon got himself up for the rôle he had to play, and within the hour, trunk and all, he arrived a second time at the house of Mr. Baker. The latter was ready to receive him, and the introduction into the house was truly conventional and commonplace—as though it had been a real visitor and a genuine arrival from the South. A meal had been prepared for the new-comer, but he declined to partake, stating that he had dined on the train, and a few moments later the two gentlemen were once again in confidential consultation in the library.

"You have shown great skill in arranging your disguise," said Mr. Baker.

"Do you think so?"

"I would not have known you."

"Indeed?"

"No, sir; your make up is perfect."

"Did Miss Ruth Tabor leave the house to-night?"

"Sir?" ejaculated Mr. Baker.

"Did Miss Tabor leave your house to-night?"

"What a strange question! No, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Certainly."

The detective was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"When I left here she was at the piano?"

"Yes."

"Did she remain at the piano or retire to her room?"

"She remained at the piano."

"You are sure?"

"Certainly. I entered the room, and she played for me."

"How long did she remain in the room?"

"For fully half an hour."

"And then where did she go?"

"She retired to her room."

"Is she in her room now?"

"Certainly."

"Can you assure yourself of that fact?"

"I saw her ascend the stairs."

"And she remained at the piano fully half an hour after I left?"

"Yes."
 "Are you telling me the truth, Mr. Baker?"
 The gentleman thus addressed assumed a look of surprise, and answered:
 "I certainly do not grasp what you are seeking to make out."
 "Suppose this robbery is traced to Miss Tabor, will you punish her?"
 "I am not certain."
 "If you recover the bonds you are not disposed to prosecute?"
 "I can not tell."
 "Have you proposed marriage to this young lady?"

Mr. Baker turned pale, and a look of anger came into his eyes.

"What concern is that of yours, sir?"
 "I will tell you."
 "Please do so."
 "I have every reason to believe that I will establish the fact that Miss Tabor stole those bonds."

As Tom Silver spoke he had his keen eyes fixed on the master of the house; but the latter merely answered:

"I believe you will."
 "The reason I asked the question was that I must be governed by your answer as to how I will conduct my investigations."

"Why, sir?"
 "I can let the lady know she is suspected, or I can avoid letting her know it."

"Do not let her know it."
 "You wish me to establish her guilt, and not let her know that she is even suspected?"

"Yes."
 "That will do, sir; you need not answer my question."

"I will answer your question. I have never proposed marriage to Miss Tabor."

"It is all right, sir. When shall I meet this young lady?"

"At breakfast to-morrow."
 "Good-night, sir. With your permission I will retire to my room."

Upon the following morning the detective met Miss Tabor at the breakfast-table, and again there came over him a strange feeling. Her face was beautiful, and one of the most innocent he had ever gazed upon. But when she spoke there went through him a cold chill. Indeed, the mystery had deepened. He had heard that voice before. He was sitting face to face with the veiled woman who had blinded him the previous night. The mystery was indeed becoming deeper and deeper.

As the consciousness swept through our hero's brain, there arose a tumult of wild conflicting thoughts in his mind. Indeed was it being demonstrated that never before in all his life had he encountered such a startling mystery.

There was no mistaking her identity. He had noted too well the tones of that voice during the memorable interview he had held with the veiled woman. And as he watched the lovely and alluringly fascinating girl—for she was but a girl after all—he read through his book of observations, and the identification was complete.

A few moments were passed in ordinary conversation, when suddenly the detective determined to subject the lady to a terrible test.

CHAPTER VI.

As our readers will remember, at the time the veiled woman was making the singular inquiries of our hero the latter was taking identification notes. She had exacted a promise that he would not seek to see her face, and he had taken a detective's privilege and had measured her through several little personal peculiarities.

Upon identifying the lady at the breakfast-table he was confronted by several very perplexing problems. There was a deep design somewhere, there was deep deceit somewhere.

Tom Silver was assured that it was Ruth Tabor who had thrown the powder in his eyes a few moments after he had left the house on the previous evening. He was assured that it was Ruth Tabor whom he had seen at the piano a few moments before he left the house; now the question arose, how had she succeeded in assuming her disguise and following him so speedily? and again, what purpose had Augustus Baker in accusing the governess by intimation of being a thief and then abiding her in a little trick? Never before had any other been confronted by such singular and contradictory incidents.

Tom Silver had asked Mr. Baker if Miss Tabor had left the house, and that gentleman had an-

swered that she had not left the house. Why should he lie in her favor, and yet seek to establish her guilt as a thief? But again the detective was confronted by another very remarkable group of facts: Miss Ruth Tabor was the very personification of artlessness and innocence. A more innocent-looking girl our hero had never looked upon, and she was self-possessed and charming in her demeanor, and did not act like either a thief or a schemer. If he had not identified her as the veiled woman he would have pronounced her innocent of crime without further study or investigation. And then again, what a marvelous adept! She must be deceptive, for when talking to him while veiled she betrayed traits of great force of character, and in her role as the simple governess she appeared as gentle and artless as one might expect to find a girl of her years.

The question that was uppermost in our hero's mind was, where does the real object of this strange game come in? It is not possible that she deceived Baker.

"He must have known he was lying to me," was our hero's mental comment. "And why should this girl follow me and be prepared to give the dose she did?" again Tom muttered, "I'll get at the bottom of this, and I'll know the game ere long."

The meal was concluded, and Mr. Baker said: "Miss Tabor, I shall leave you to entertain the professor, as I am compelled to go downtown."

Here was another strange incident: Mr. Baker evidently was working a game for the detective to be alone with the governess, and if that were his purpose why had he lied the evening before?

Mr. Baker left the house, and the detective and Ruth entered the parlor. The former went to the piano and looked over the music. He did so to relieve the embarrassment of the situation, as the young lady appeared to be considerably embarrassed, and at length Tom said:

"You have a fine collection of music here."

Ruth Tabor was a musical enthusiast, and so also was our hero, and by degrees he drew the young lady into a musical discussion, and his rare knowledge and good taste soon enabled him to draw her into an animated conversation, and at a critical moment he suddenly declared:

"It is strange, Miss Tabor, but I am convinced that you and I have met before."

"I do not recall ever having met you, professor."

"My voice does not strike you as familiar?"

"Not at all."

"And yet I am sure I have heard your voice before."

"I suspect you have heard some one with a voice resembling mine. I do not think we ever met before."

"Let me see, I recall the circumstance now—yes, yes, I remember. I was in New York about three months ago; I had been busy all day, and I stopped in a restaurant somewhere downtown to get a hurried meal, and while I was in the saloon a lady and gentleman entered. The lady was veiled, but I heard her speak—her voice made a deep impression upon my mind. My memory is excellent, Miss Tabor; it strikes me you must have been the lady—the veiled lady."

Ruth looked the detective straight in the face, laughed in an ingenuous manner, and answered:

"It was not my voice you heard, professor."

"You never entered a restaurant with a gentleman?"

"Never."

"How strange that I should associate you with that incident."

"Possibly that is the lady whose voice resembles mine; but I never took a meal in a restaurant in New York in my life, so you see positively it could not have been I."

"Certainly it could not have been you. Your simple statement is sufficient. But it is strange that the lady's voice should have made such an impression upon my memory."

"It is strange."

The detective at this moment coughed, and at once he said:

"I think I took a little cold last night, the air was chilly and penetrating. Were you out last evening?"

"No, sir; I rarely go out in the evening, in fact, I was not out of the house at all yesterday."

"My friend Baker is very fond of music?"

"Oh, yes, very fond of music, and he often gets me to play and sing for him; indeed, last evening I played and sang for him a full hour. I know I became quite fatigued, but I believe he would have had me play the night through."

The conversation took another turn, and after

a little time the pretended professor said he would retire to his room and write a few letters.

Tom did retire to his room, and he was thus far a baffled man. Miss Ruth Tabor was one of the best actors or dissemblers on earth, or there was something really more weird than mysterious in the incidents that confronted our hero step by step.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. BAKER returned to luncheon, and after the meal he and the detective retired to the library.

"Well, what do you think?" came the question.

"I think this is a very mysterious affair."

"Yes, it is mysterious in one sense, but there can exist no special mystery; as concerning the robbery it is a clear case of steal—that is all."

"I told you I did not desire to listen to your story until I had seen and talked with Miss Tabor."

"You did."

"I have had that talk."

"Well?"

"I am now prepared to listen to your story."

"What conclusion have you reached?"

"I have stated my conclusion. I have said it was a very mysterious case."

"And that is the only conclusion you have reached?"

"So far—yes."

"How about the young lady's guilt?"

"We will talk about that later. How did you first meet Miss Tabor?"

"She was recommended to me by my lawyer."

"How long has she been the governess of your children?"

"About three months."

"Had you any previous acquaintance with her?"

"Never."

"Do you know anything about her antecedents?"

"I do not."

"You did not know her family?"

"No, sir."

"Her name was not familiar to you?"

"No, sir."

"She came to you as a stranger?"

"She did."

"Simply upon the recommendation of your lawyer?"

"Yes."

"Is this lawyer your friend?"

"He was my father's clerk."

"And you have known him for years?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are a wealthy man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you make your own fortune or did you inherit it?"

"I inherited my fortune from my father."

"Was your father a merchant?"

"No; a lawyer."

"A resident of New York?"

"No, sir; he practiced in California."

"Where did he die?"

"In California."

"And you came on to New York after his death?"

"Yes."

"How long has your father been dead?"

"About fifteen years."

"Where does this lawyer who recommended Miss Tabor to you reside?"

"He resides in Virginia."

"He is a wealthy man?"

"Yes, I believe he is; but why do you ask these irrelevant questions?"

"I have a purpose in asking these questions. As I said, this is a very mysterious affair. There is a strange motive somewhere."

"I was to tell you my story."

"Yes; proceed."

"You may think it strange that I suspect Miss Tabor?"

"I do."

"Let me tell you why I suspect her. I have a very strange story to tell."

"Let me hear your narrative."

"I will make a confession to you in perfect confidence. I will show to you what a fool a man can be. Miss Tabor had not been a day under this roof before I fell madly in love with her. I love her now—my passion for her is a madness, but for reasons which I will narrate I have not told her of my love. She does not suspect it, and I have studiously avoided giving her the slightest reason to suspect my madness."

You said there was a mystery in this case. There is. When I employed you I did not intend to tell you what I have now decided to reveal, but I see certain suspicions are running through your mind. You may clear up the mystery of the robbery, and in so doing may also solve a double mystery. Miss Tabor had been in my house about a week, and I found her one of the most charming, and, as I believed, one of the most lovely and lovable women on the face of the earth. I had resolved to wait but a reasonable time and then declare my passion, but, as I have intimated, certain strange, weird incidents have occurred that caused me to conceal my passion. I left town for a few days about two weeks after Miss Tabor had been installed in my house, and I came home suddenly. I went up to the nursery. The door was closed, and I stopped to listen to the prattle of my children; but a different sound fell upon my ear. I heard a man's voice in the room, and Miss Tabor was talking to this man in a persuasive manner, and I heard her say, 'Oh, I love you, so for my sake wait and be patient.'

"I did not stay to listen further. I descended the stairs and lay in wait. I determined to see this man when he came down the stairs. I determined to confront him as though I were surprised to see a stranger in my house. I waited an hour, and the man did not descend the stairs. I became alarmed and ascended to the room. I knocked at the door. It was opened by Miss Tabor, and she exclaimed:

"Oh, sir, you have returned?"

"I said, 'Yes; where are the children?"

"They have gone out to walk with the nurse."

"I glanced into the room but could see no one, and I said:

"Will you go and call the children in, Miss Tabor?"

"Certainly," she answered.

"I descended the stairs and waited and watched a moment. Later Miss Tabor came down and passed to the lower hall and out to the street. I then ran upstairs and entered the nursery. I ran from room to room and looked everywhere, but could see no signs of a visitor. My search was thorough. I returned to the nursery, and my eyes rested upon a glove—it was a gentleman's glove. I renewed my search, but I could find no other sign of the presence of a man."

"Did you secure the glove?"

"I did. I concluded she had not seen the glove, and consequently would not miss it. Under all the circumstances she would not have left it lying around."

"You still have the glove?"

"Yes, sir."

"I would like to see it."

Mr. Baker drew the glove from his wallet and passed it to the officer. Tom examined it critically, and finally said:

"It is indeed a gentleman's glove, but belongs to a hand not much larger than a lady's."

"That is true."

"Proceed with your narrative."

"There had been a man in the house—yes, in that room, but he had most mysteriously disappeared. I returned to my own room, and awaited the return of the children, and I watched the motions of Miss Tabor. Well, you know how innocent she seems—how lovely and how artless! No one would accuse her of deception, and yet I had the most positive proof that she was engaged in an intrigue."

"The mere fact of her having a gentleman visitor can not be called an intrigue."

"No; had her visitor come to the house openly, but he came secretly, and he departed in the most mysterious manner. None of my servants knew of the presence of any one in the house."

"You questioned them?"

"Not in a direct manner, but indirectly; indeed, by insinuating that they had had company, thinking that in order to vindicate themselves they would implicate Miss Tabor, I became convinced that they knew nothing of the presence of a male visitor."

"Did you question Miss Tabor?"

"No. But I watched, and later on I received a singular confirmation of her duplicity."

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE mystery deepens, and I have not yet joined the first link," was the thought that ran through our hero's mind, and to Mr. Baker he said:

"You watched her?"

"I did."

"And you received additional grounds for suspicion?"

"Yes. You have met Miss Tabor, and you know how hard it is to suspect her. She is, in her appearance and actions, an angel, and yet, sir, under all her marvelous semblance of innocence and artlessness, I fear she is the most skillful schemer in woman's form that exists upon this earth."

"She certainly does appear innocent and artless, and were it not that I am in possession of certain facts that appear to confirm the suspicions you are presenting I should defend her; as it is, I can but listen."

"Then you are in possession of certain facts?"

"I am."

"What are they?"

"I must first hear your story to the end."

"But you are prepared to believe she is a monument of deceit?"

"I can only say that there is something very mysterious about the young lady. Go on with your statements. You said you watched her?"

"I did."

"With what intent?"

"To tell the truth I even descended to a disguise, and I followed her when she went out to walk."

"But you never questioned her about her visitor?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I thought I could verify my suspicions without speaking to her, and I did. She does not go out often, and I will say she is a most faithful teacher to my children. She appears to love them. She is kind and gentle to them, and they adore her. No woman could perform her duties more faithfully. And, as I said, she seldom goes out; but sometimes she receives a letter, and I have discovered that she burns those letters immediately after reading them. My discovery of the latter fact was accidental, and I discovered that immediately after the receipt of one of those letters she went for a walk, and that she always dressed herself in the plainest attire, and I also discovered that after she left the house she always covered her face with a heavy black veil."

Tom gave a start, and asked:

"Of what material is that veil?"

Mr. Baker named the material, and Tom said:

"Proceed."

"You have something to tell me, Mr. Silver. You have met that veiled lady?"

"No, no; go on with your narrative."

"I followed her several times, and she managed to dodge me."

"To dodge you?"

"Yes."

"Then she knew that she was being followed?"

"I can not say, but it does so appear, and yet I can not see how she could suspect such a fact."

"She must have known that you were following her?"

"So I thought, and then again I dismissed the suspicion."

"Why did you dismiss it, sir?"

"Because I thought if she knew I followed her she must also know that I suspected her, and she would in some way betray the fact. She never has done so. Her demeanor toward me is as artless and confidential as that of a child. And it does not seem possible that even with all her art as a deceiver that she could conceal betraying a consciousness that she was under suspicion."

"There is a great deal in what you say, and, sir, this case, the longer I study it, presents incidents of greater mystery. I repeat to you, as I have repeated to myself, that it is the most mysterious affair that ever came under my attention."

"One day I followed her and managed to keep her in sight, and I saw her go to a certain place and wait, and from her actions I knew she was expecting some one. It was a tryst. She waited and waited, and at length turned and walked away. I could not see her face because of the veil, but if I had seen her face I know I should have seen written upon it a look of deep disappointment. Her manner was dejected as she walked back toward my house. On the following day, however, she went forth again."

"Did she go so frequently?"

"No; this was the first time she had gone out two days successively; but I was watching. I knew she had been disappointed on the previous day, and I thought she would go again, and she did."

"And you followed her?"

"I did; but strangely enough she managed to evade me. I lost sight of her."

"You should have gone to the place where she awaited some one on the previous day."

"I did; I had the bearings, and lo! I found her there; but I came just a moment too late, as I saw a carriage drawn up to the curb, a man alighted, and she entered the carriage with him. I was too far away to identify the man's features."

"You are sure it was Miss Tabor?"

"Yes, I recognized her easily enough."

"Did you follow the carriage?"

"I tried to do so; but it was driven too fast for me, and I lost sight of it."

"And Miss Tabor returned to your house?"

"She did."

"That same day?"

"Within two hours."

"And did you speak to her about meeting her?"

"No."

"You have never given her the least hint that you knew of her secret meetings with a man?"

"I never have."

"And all this time she attended to her duties?"

"Yes, and appeared as innocent and as artless as you see her."

The detective was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"It is all very strange."

"Yes, sir; it is all very strange."

"How is it you specially sought me as the detective to act in this matter?"

"I sought you because I had heard of you through a friend—a southern gentleman. He told me you were a gentleman as well as an excellent officer."

"I am very much obliged to your friend; and did he know the business you had on hand for me?"

"No; I have not confided the affair to a living soul but you."

"I am glad of that, and I will solve the mystery."

"I did not intend to make a confidant of you when I first employed you."

"It is well that you decided to do so."

"Yes; and now I have told you all."

"And you still love this lady?"

"I do. Our heart's impulses we can not control."

"But suppose I shall prove her to be the thief?"

"There is no doubt but she is the thief."

"And you still love her?"

"Yes."

"And you will continue to love her?"

"I can not help it."

"Mr. Baker, I've a question to ask: What is your game?"

CHAPTER IX.

MR. BAKER glared in amazement. The declaration and question came like the sudden explosion of a bomb. The detective's manner was pronounced, and there was a terrible significance in the tones of his voice.

After a moment Mr. Baker said, in a low tone:

"I do not understand what you mean. I thought you were a gentleman?"

"I am a gentleman and I am an officer."

"I have been betrayed," said Mr. Baker, in a dejected tone.

"You have been betrayed?"

"Yes."

"Why do you say that you have been betrayed?"

"You gain my confidence and then you assault me."

"Have I assaulted you?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Your question is an assault."

"No, sir, it is not an assault; I spoke in your interest. I will tell you frankly that there is something behind or underneath all you have revealed to me, or rather under what you have pretended to reveal to me."

"Under what I have pretended to reveal to you?" repeated Mr. Baker.

"Yes."

"I have spoken nothing but the truth."

"You so declare?"

"I do."

"On your honor?"

"Yes, sir; within a few moments I have

made you my friend, and you are a comparative stranger to me. Yes, I have taken you into my full confidence."

"Your full confidence?"

"Yes, I have revealed to you that which I have not whispered to another living soul."

"And I claim that you are deceiving me."

"You claim that I am deceiving you?"

"I do."

"Then you are self-deceived, or you have been misled."

"We shall see. I propose to ask you a question. I expect a direct and frank answer."

"Proceed."

"Why did you deceive me as to the fact that Miss Tabor left your house last night?"

"Miss Tabor did not leave my house last night."

The detective looked Mr. Baker full in the face, and said:

"Will you swear Miss Tabor did not leave your house last night?"

"I will swear she did not leave my house last night, unless it was after I had retired."

"Not even for a few moments?"

"Not for one minute."

"You remember when I left here after my first call?"

"Yes."

"I left Miss Tabor in the parlor."

"Yes."

"And you went into the parlor?"

"I did."

"And she remained at the piano?"

"She did."

"On your oath?"

"On my oath. Why, sir, what do you mean, what are you driving at?"

"The mystery deepens. Mr. Baker, I believe you are telling me the truth. If you are your statement presents a most strange, weird, and wonderful suggestion."

"How?"

"I can not tell you now, but I will ask you another question. Suppose I should prove Miss Tabor's innocence?"

"No, no; you never can. She is guilty, possibly not in heart, but in deed. She stole those bonds."

"Ah! I see. You prefer to prove her guilty. You do not desire to have her innocence established."

"If it were possible to establish her innocence I would be the happiest man on earth."

"You would?"

"I would."

"And yet you proclaim her innocence can not be established?"

"It can not be established. She is the thief. You may prove a motive or establish an instigation that might lessen her moral guilt, but you can never prove her absolute innocence."

"Would it please you if I were to do so?"

"It would. Yes, it would make me the happiest man on earth."

"In my own mind I believe her innocent," said Tom.

"You believe her innocent?"

"Yes."

"Will you explain your grounds for your belief in her innocence?"

"Not now; but just set your mind at rest for the present and leave all to me, and let me say that my promise is founded on the belief that your statement is true."

"What statement?"

"The statement that Miss Tabor did not leave this house last night."

"She did not. I will swear to that fact."

"And you are sure there was a man in her room at the time you returned from your journey?"

"Yes."

"And it was a man with whom she entered the carriage?"

"Yes."

"All right; we will know more in a few days."

An hour later the detective left the house. He hastened to his lodgings, and soon reappeared in the vicinity of Mr. Baker's house. He was thoroughly disguised, and he hung around the neighborhood all the afternoon and until after nightfall, and then he worked a transform, and, as the professor, entered the house.

That evening he spent in company with Mr. Baker. The latter had induced Miss Tabor to perform for their amusement upon the piano, and our hero had a good opportunity to study her well, and the result of his study was a deeper mystification, as he secured confirmatory

proof of her identity with the veiled lady who held the strange interview with him.

That evening, when our hero and Mr. Baker were alone, the detective said:

"Can you arrange in some way, without arousing suspicion, to induce Miss Tabor to go out?"

"She will go out to-morrow, I think."

"She will?"

"Yes, I intended to inform you this evening. She received a letter, and the letter appeared to cause her considerable agitation. It came from the mysterious man, no doubt."

"Good; to-morrow we will follow her," said our hero.

That morning at the breakfast-table our hero incidentally mentioned that he was going out of town for the day, and might possibly remain away overnight, or he might return late in the evening.

Immediately after the meal Tom left the house, and half an hour later, well equipped for the scheme he had in hand, he lay in wait near the house where he was a guest under such strange circumstances.

He waited and watched, and closely observed every person who passed Mr. Baker's residence, and evidently without result, and so the time passed until late in the afternoon, when he saw Miss Tabor leave the house. He fell to her trail, and he saw her when a half a square from the house draw down the heavy veil over her face. He followed her to a certain quarter, where she stood for some moments looking around in every direction, and then she walked away, but did not go beyond sight of the corner, and soon she returned, and so she alternated for a long time. Indeed, two hours passed and the evening shadows fell, the street-lamps were lighted, and she paced and watched, and our hero, who was watching her, at length muttered:

"He cometh not, she said," and so it proved, for finally the fair girl turned and walked away, evidently intending to return home.

CHAPTER X.

TOM SILVER had gotten himself up so that he appeared exactly as he had upon the night when he held the strange interview with the veiled lady, and when Miss Tabor started to return home he followed close upon her track. He kept close enough to her to have overheard any muttered words that might fall from her lips. She reached Mr. Baker's home and ascended the stoop, and as the door opened to permit her to enter, the detective ran up the stoop and said:

"Excuse me, miss, but I desire to have a few words with you."

Ruth had removed the veil, and her lovely face was clearly revealed, and there came to it a ghastly look as the detective addressed her. Such a marvelous change in a human face the officer had never previously beheld, and a chill went through his heart as a terrible suspicion flashed through his mind.

The servant had opened the door, and seeing it was only the governess, he had walked away, leaving it for her to close after her entrance, so at the moment the detective addressed her no one was within hearing.

In a voice quivering with agitation the lovely girl said:

"You wish to speak to me, sir?"

"I do."

"You are a stranger, sir."

"You do not recognize me?"

"I do not, sir; I never saw you before."

"It is strange. I am a detective. You can speak with me here, or we will go somewhere else; but I must speak with you."

The look of terror deepened upon the fair girl's face; indeed, the detective feared she would faint, and if terror were born of guilt it seemed to speak upon her ghastly face at that moment.

"If you will go away, sir, and wait at the corner, I will join you. I can not receive you in this house."

"You will come and meet me?"

"I will."

"Miss, you need feel no fear. I simply desire to ask you a few questions. I will not detain you long."

"I will join you, sir."

"Immediately?"

"Within half an hour."

"You will surely come?"

"I will."

"Understand me, miss, I must see and speak

with you; but I repeat, I merely desire to ask you a few questions, and will not detain you."

"I will join you, sir."

The detective descended to the sidewalk, and the lady entered the house, and Tom Silver muttered:

"I have been deceived. Great Scott! that lovely girl is a criminal. I am almost sorry I am in this case—but we shall see."

Tom stood on the corner, and strange, sad thoughts ran through his mind, and again he was compelled to mutter it was the strangest case that he had ever come under his attention. He muttered:

"Her face is the face of an angel. She is guilty and she is not guilty. Some strange, weird motive has tempted her to the commission of this crime; but we shall see, we shall see," he repeated.

Half an hour passed and our hero saw Miss Tabor leave the house, and she walked direct toward the corner where the detective awaited her.

"I am glad you have come, miss."

"You will not detain me long?"

"No; but I desire that you come with me to where there is a strong light."

"Why, sir?"

"I think you will recognize me."

"No, no; I never saw you before."

"You have not had a good look at me yet. We shall see. I think you will recognize me."

A short distance away there was located one of the most fashionable ladies and gentlemen's restaurants in New York. The detective led the way to the resort, and he said:

"I will not detain you long; but we will enter here. I wish you to see my face."

They entered and took a seat at a table. The light was strong enough. Our hero had a full, clear view of his companion's face; she had the same advantage.

"Look at me," he said.

"I never saw you before."

The girl had, in a most marvelous manner, recovered her self-possession, and the fact that she was able to do so militated against her in the detective's mind, and confirmed his suspicions. It needed nerve and experience to recover as she had recovered from the sense of fright that agitated her when Tom first addressed her.

"You do not even now recognize me?"

"No, sir."

"It is strange."

"I do not believe it is possible I ever saw you, sir, but again it is possible. Can you not enlighten me as to when and where we met?"

"Ah!" thought Tom, "she is deep."

The detective penetrated her game, and he said:

"I can aid your memory, but I'd rather have you recall the circumstances of our former meeting."

"I can not."

"About three months ago, miss, I was leaving police headquarters when a veiled lady accosted me."

The girl sat immovable, and the detective after a pause continued:

"This lady was a stranger to me. She put me under promises which forbade my seeking to learn her identity, and then we had a long talk. Do you not recall the circumstance?"

"Proceed, sir. What did she reveal to you?"

The detective, as our readers will learn, was a "keenener." He did not recite the real revelation that had been made to him that night. He concocted a narrative. He did it purposely. He really believed he was talking with the heroine of that interview. He believed she did recognize him, and he intended to trap her into a correction, but when he had concluded his false and well-concocted tale, to his utter astonishment the beautiful girl said:

"Yes, I do recognize you; I recognized you from the start; but I desired to learn whether or not you really remembered all I said to you that night."

Tom Silver was knocked endways.

"You do remember me?"

"Yes."

"And you remembered me from the start?"

"Yes."

"Then permit me, miss, to say that you are a deceitful little witch."

CHAPTER XI.

THE detective had said that she was a deceitful little witch, and spoke in a laughing tone, but, in reality, he was taken all aback. The mystery fell back into deeper shadow.

"I am not deceitful," said the girl. "I am only careful."
"You are only careful, eh?"

"Yes."
"Well, miss, you are altogether too careful, and in this instance you have, as the boys say, put your foot in it."

Ruth Tabor's face again assumed a ghastly hue.

"What do you mean, sir?" she asked.
"You say you remember me?"

"Yes."
"You say you remember the conversation that occurred between us?"

"Yes."
Ruth spoke in a hesitating voice, and she trembled violently.

"Young lady, you are deceiving me."

The girl made no answer, but sat speechless.
"You remember the interview and the incidents attending it," continued the detective, and he further added: "I misquoted the subject of the conversation of that night. Will you please prove that you really recognize me by setting me right? Will you tell me just what did occur that evening and just what was said?"

The expression upon the girl's face was pitiful to behold; but after a moment she said:

"I can not."
"You can not?"

"No."
"Then why did you say you remembered?"

"I desired to close this interview. I was prepared to agree to anything. You have made a serious mistake. I could not convince you to that effect, so I tried to release myself by agreeing to all you said."

"I have made a serious mistake, you say?"

"Yes."
"How?"

"I never met you before in all my life!"

The detective was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"It is possible I have made a mistake. You will please excuse me, and I will escort you back to your home."

"You need not escort me, sir; I can go home alone."

The detective accompanied the girl to the street and bid her good-night, and when he strolled off in a contrary direction, he muttered:
"Hang it! this mystery deepens at every step. That girl is the best actress I ever met in my life; she threw me off in the most skillful manner. But I will get to the bottom of all this yet!"

Our hero did not return to Mr. Baker's house until the following day, and then he appeared once more in the character of the professor. He met Ruth Tabor, and she appeared as calm, as sweet, as innocent and artless as she had appeared upon the night when he first met her.

It was after all in the house had retired when the detective had his first opportunity for a talk with Mr. Baker.

"Well, sir," said that gentleman, "what have you learned?"

"Nothing."
"You followed Ruth?"

"I did."
"And did you see the party she was to meet?"

"No."
"It is strange."

"What is strange?"

"You say she did not meet the party?"

"She did not."
"And she did not go out to-day?"

"Have you noticed anything strange in her appearance?"

"No."

"I will leave here to-day. I have made all the investigations necessary under my present disguise, save that I desire to make one more test. I have a proposition to make."

"What is your proposition?"

"I wish to subject Miss Tabor to one more ordeal."

"I will aid you if I can."

"You can."

"What shall I do?"

"I wish to arrange so that Miss Tabor and I will be alone together. You will suddenly rush into the room, close the doors, blind us to secrecy, and then announce the loss of a large sum of money from your safe, but do not name the amount."

Mr. Baker was silent for a moment, and then said:

"I can not see what you will gain by the disclosure."

"You may not see what I will gain, but it is possible I may make a startling discovery."

"I will frankly say I'd rather not do as you request."

"You wish to discover the thief?"

"Yes; but I do not under any circumstances desire that Miss Tabor should know that I suspect her."

"The very fact of your coming and confidentially announcing your loss to us would suggest that you did not suspect either one of us."

"But suppose she is really guilty?"

"Well?"

"I desire to really establish the fact without her ever knowing that I had discovered her guilt, unless under certain circumstances I should later on determine to inform her."

"If you carry out my suggestion you do not even intimate to her that you suspect her."

"I may betray myself."

"No need to do so."

The detective urged his proposition, and finally Mr. Baker consented to carry out the plan.

Our hero under his disguise as the professor was alone in the parlor with Miss Tabor, the servant having taken the children out for a walk, when suddenly Mr. Baker rushed into the room.

He played his part well. He closed the doors and threw himself into a chair, looking like a madman. Our hero ran toward him, and demanded:

"My dear sir, what is the matter?"

"Something terrible has happened," came the answer.

"What has happened?"

Mr. Baker looking first toward one and then the other, and at length said:

"I can trust you?"

"Certainly."

"I can trust you both?"

"Certainly."

It was the detective alone who answered, and Mr. Baker said:

"Miss Tabor, you are an inmate of my house. I have been overtaken by a great calamity. I can trust you to keep my secret?"

Miss Tabor's face was pale, very pale; but there was no particular suggestion in her paleness, as almost any woman, innocent or guilty, would have shown excitement and alarm under the circumstances.

The lady answered:

"I will certainly keep any secret with which you may intrust me, sir."

"I can rely upon you both?"

"You can," answered the detective.

"I have been robbed!" exclaimed Mr. Baker.

"Robbed!" ejaculated the detective.

"Yes, sir."

"What has been stolen?"

"A large amount in bonds."

When the announcement came our hero pretended to have his eyes fixed on Mr. Baker, but in fact his glance was directed toward Ruth.

The latter showed some excitement, but no more than any lady would betray under the circumstances, and his glance was still directed toward her, as Mr. Baker proceeded to tell how the bonds must have been taken from his safe by some one in the house.

CHAPTER XII.

THE test proved a failure as far as it was intended to force a sign from Ruth Tabor, and the detective again was baffled, and a certain conclusion was forced upon his mind—either the girl was really innocent, or she was an adept in crime, with a nerve greater than that of any criminal he had ever met in his life.

The little game was carried to a conclusion, and later on the detective and Mr. Baker were alone.

"And what do you think now?" once again came the question.

"I was never more at sea," came the answer.

"You looked for a self-betrayal?"

"I did."

"What is suggested to your mind now?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Certainly."

"As matters stand at this moment the suggestion that forces itself upon my mind is that Miss Ruth Tabor is innocent."

Mr. Baker gave a start.

"Innocent, did you say?"

"Yes."

"She is not innocent!"

"You speak in a positive tone."

"I do; I have positive evidence of her guilt."

"You have?"

"I have."

"Then why did you employ me?"

"Although I have positive evidence of her guilt I have no proof."

"No proof?"

"No, sir."

"But your evidence is positive?"

"Yes."

"How positive?"

"It is absolute."

"Absolute?"

"Yes."

"Are there any facts you have withheld from me?"

"Yes."

"Then the investigation has advanced far enough for me to know all."

Mr. Baker hesitated a moment, and then said:

"I did not wish, if I could avoid it, to make a confidant of you as concerns the positive evidence in my possession; I thought it would be sufficient to indicate to you the almost absolute certainty of Miss Tabor's guilt. I had a purpose and a reason."

"Name your purpose and your reason."

"My purpose was founded on the fact of my mad love for her. My reason was founded upon the belief that at heart Ruth is innocent—that she has been urged on to the committal of the deed by another."

"And who is that other?"

"The man who was in her room at the time I returned suddenly, as I related to you, and the man whom she goes to meet."

"Mr. Baker, if your reason is founded on the true fact, I can not see how you can love a woman who loves another man to the extent that at his instigation she will commit a terrible crime."

The detective's plain, straightforward, sensible statement caused Mr. Baker to wince; but he said:

"This man may hold a weird power over the girl. She may not love him; it may be some other tie that binds them."

"If this man hold such a power over her it is because she loves him; of that you may rest assured."

"I do not believe it. She does not act like a person who is in love; I have studied her well. Indeed, her actions suggest an entirely different sentiment."

"What sentiment?"

"That of fear."

"Mr. Baker, I will say you are a man of keen discernment."

"I am not a fool; I would not love this beautiful woman if I thought she loved another."

We will not here reveal how fully in accord the detective's suspicions were with those of Mr. Baker, and he said:

"You have not yet revealed to me the evidence you have of her guilt."

"It is not what can be called evidence; it is only demonstration—ocular demonstration."

"Aha! did you see her take the bonds?"

"No."

"Please explain."

"One night I was aroused by hearing some one in my room. I rose quickly, struck a match, and caught just a glimpse of a female as she hastily retreated."

"And this intruder was Miss Tabor?"

"Yes."

"You fully identified her?"

"It was a female who entered my room."

"But there are other females in the house?"

"Yes; but it was Miss Tabor who intruded into my room."

"You might have been mistaken."

"I am not mistaken; I am positive."

"I can not accept your testimony."

"But you will when I tell you that after the robbery there came again an intruder into my room. Upon the second occasion I did not strike a match, I did not move, but watched. When the intruder neared my bedside I pretended to be asleep, and the woman came in on tiptoe and leaned over me, and as she retreated I opened my eyes, and she produced a masked lantern, and by her own light she was betrayed. She passed the mirror; the light from her masked lantern flashed on the glass, and her face for an instant was revealed, and it was the face of Miss Ruth Tabor. Is not that positive evidence?"

"You say this second visit was made after the robbery?"

"Yes."

"Why did you not accuse her of the theft?"

"Bahl how could I prove her presence there. She would deny it. She might say I was dreaming. No, no; I do not desire to make the accusation until I have positive evidence, until I

can say, 'confess, or I will send you to jail.' And when I make that threat I desire to be able to carry it out if I see fit."

The detective had listened attentively, and when Mr. Baker had concluded, Tom said:

"In the face of your positive evidence I am still of the opinion that Miss Tabor is innocent."

Mr. Baker stared.

"You are surprised?"

"I am, sir."

"This is a very mysterious case."

"But you have a theory."

"What makes you think so?"

"Otherwise you would not be so positive. What is your theory?"

"My theory is not sufficiently well confirmed at present for me to state it, but let me go upon record as declaring that when this mystery is cleared up that Miss Ruth Tabor will come out of the investigation without a blemish upon her reputation."

"How about the man?"

"Ah, that is another mystery; indeed, at every step we are confronted by strange and mysterious incidents; but my faith in Miss Tabor's innocence is unshaken."

"Why are you so positive as concerns her innocence?"

"My conclusions in her favor are founded entirely upon her personality. I do not believe she is capable of crime."

"I have expressed the same confidence in her innate innocence of character; but she might have been instigated by another."

"I do not believe that she is even so far guilty."

"Despite the fact that she was twice in my room, and once revealed by a masked lantern carried in her own hand?"

"Despite all that, I believe her innocent. I do not believe she stole the bonds."

Mr. Baker looked the detective straight in the face, and asked:

"Then you believe I was dreaming?"

"No," came the answer.

CHAPTER XIII.

For a few moments both men were lost in deep thought, and the silence was broken by Mr. Baker, who said:

"You certainly afford me a great deal of encouragement."

"Are you speaking seriously?"

"I am."

"How, then, am I affording you encouragement when I really go against your positive evidence?"

"No man on earth would be more delighted if Miss Tabor's innocence were established."

"I think it will be; and now let me put myself squarely upon record. My belief in her innocence is, as I said, based entirely upon her personality. I will admit that all the proofs appear to suggest her guilt, and here is where I propose to risk my reputation for keen discernment. In the face of all the proofs, I declare her innocence—her absolute innocence, both in intent and in fact."

"I wish you would state your theory."

"I can not do so now, but I will tell you one thing. I hope within a few days to develop some very startling facts, indeed a most singular *dénouement*. I may fail, but I think not."

That same day our hero, as the professor, left Mr. Baker's house; he had accomplished under that rôle all that he could expect. He had been in close association with the accused girl, and had got upon facts warranting a theory, and it remained for him to demonstrate his theory.

At the proper moment our hero sought Miss Tabor. He announced his departure, and said good-bye. Miss Tabor expressed considerable surprise when she heard that the professor was going away, and her manner was very singular, and after a moment she said:

"I am sorry you are going, sir."

"You flatter me, Miss Tabor; but I must go. I have enjoyed my brief visit here."

"I would like to speak to you about something, sir."

"I will be proud to be your auditor."

"Where is Mr. Baker?"

"He has gone out."

"And we are alone?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where Mr. Baker has gone?"

"I do not."

"What do you think of the robbery? I can reass with you as he announced he does in our status presence."

The detective was eager and asked for no

ment. He hardly knew what answer to make, and to gain time he said:

"You ask me what I think of it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because I think you are a very clear-headed gentleman, and I consider the robbery a most extraordinary incident."

"Miss Tabor, I have hardly had time to think upon the matter."

"You were advising with Mr. Baker?"

"Yes."

"What are the circumstances of the robbery?"

"Mr. Baker sold a large piece of property and took in payment a large sum in United States bonds. He put these bonds in his safe, intending to put them in the bank on the following day; during the night they were stolen, or at least a part of them."

"When were they stolen?"

"The same night that he placed them there."

There came a far-away look in Miss Tabor's eyes as she repeated:

"They were stolen the same night he placed them in his safe?"

The detective was knocked clean over. He had been led into an odd admission, but he was equal to the occasion, and answered:

"I suppose so."

"But," said the lovely lady, "he did not make the discovery until to-day."

The detective was as weak as a woman.

"I suppose so," he admitted.

"That sale took place over a week ago."

"Did it?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you come to be aware of the fact?"

"Mr. Baker told me he had sold a large and valuable piece of property."

"But he may not have made the transfer until yesterday."

"The transfer was made over a week ago."

"It was?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, well! Did he tell you so?"

"No; but I read of the transaction in the paper on the day following, and I desired to ask you why Mr. Baker concealed the fact of the robbery until to-day, and why he announced it as he did—as though he had just made the discovery of his loss."

"I should say he had just made the discovery."

"But you said that the robbery took place the same night the bonds were placed in the safe."

Tom Silver was at bay. This bright, beautiful woman had driven him into a dilemma as to conflicting statements, and he said:

"Miss Tabor, will you tell me frankly your purpose in questioning me?"

"I will, sir."

"Do so."

"Whom does Mr. Baker suspect as the thief?"

Miss Tabor had let the detective have it square between the eyes, figuratively speaking.

"Miss, I can not tell you who he suspects."

"You know."

"I know?"

"Yes."

"How should I know?"

"He has told you. The announcement of that robbery to-day, in the manner it was announced, had a purpose. Does Mr. Baker suspect that I stole the bonds?"

The last question took the detective's breath away again, figuratively speaking. He had received a second plumper squarely between the eyes.

"Miss Tabor," said our hero, "you had better ask Mr. Baker whom he suspects."

"No, I desire to ask you."

"It is still a matter of conjecture with him, I reckon."

"He suspects me, sir. I know it."

The detective made no answer, and for an interval there followed an awkward silence; but later on the lovely lady said:

"I desire to say to you, sir, that I am innocent. Do not tell Mr. Baker that I have talked with you. Let him proceed. Some day my innocence will be established; but I tell you now I am innocent. I did not take his bonds."

"I believe you, Miss Tabor."

"You do not deny then that he suspects me?"

"I am glad you have made me your confidant," was the answer.

"I have but one word more to say, sir. Were it not that I know he suspects me I would leave this house instantly, but I will not leave it, I will remain until he establishes my innocence,

and then I shall go. But will you please remember that I declared my innocence to you, and also keep your promise not to tell Mr. Baker or any one else that I did so?"

CHAPTER XIV.

A FEW moments later and the detective had left the house. In parting finally from Miss Tabor he said:

"I shall not see Mr. Baker again before my departure. We have spoken our adieux, and consequently I will not have an opportunity to break my promise, even though I desired to do so."

The detective had made no promise, but he wished to let it go as though he had, and in fact he did not desire to reveal to Mr. Baker the strange facts that had come out during his brief talk with the beautiful suspect.

Once alone, however, the detective had food for much thought and speculation. The talk with Miss Tabor had been a strange incident in the whole strange series of incidents.

"Why should she be so anxious to impress me as concerns her innocence, and how comes it she knows so much? Indeed she is a wonderful girl, and can it be, after all, that I am deceived and that she is guilty? Great guns! despite my faith in her, there does present itself a possibility that after all she is the thief."

The detective had given his address to Mr. Baker, and it was arranged that that gentleman could communicate with our hero at any time if necessary.

Upon the morning following the incidents we have recorded, bright and early Mr. Baker appeared at Tom Silver's lodgings. That gentleman was greatly excited.

"Ah! you have come early, sir."

"Yes."

"Something extraordinary has occurred?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is Miss Tabor dead?"

"No."

"Well, what is the occasion of this early call?"

"You will never guess."

"I shall not try."

"I have made a find."

"A find?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I have found my missing bonds."

Tom Silver did give a start—an unusual act for him.

"You have found your missing bonds?"

"Yes."

"Well, well! You know I suggested that you had mislaid them."

"I did not mislay them. No, sir; they were stolen and have been returned."

"They were stolen and have been returned?" repeated the detective.

"Yes, sir."

"Where did you find them?"

"In my safe."

"In your safe?"

"Yes, and in the original package, just as they were when I first placed them there the night they were stolen."

The detective was really amazed. He could not at first really realize that the gentleman's statement could be true.

"Tell me the facts," he said.

"This morning I opened my safe and found the bonds just where I had originally put them."

"Mr. Baker, those bonds were never absent from your safe."

"On my honor, on my oath as a gentleman, they were stolen, and they have been returned."

"But how could the repentant thief gain access to your safe?"

"That is the mystery; some one must know the combination as well as I; but I will swear that the bonds were stolen and have been returned."

"And in the original package?"

"Yes."

"Were all the bonds in one package at the time they were stolen?"

"No; two hundred thousand were in one package, and fifty thousand were in another. The two hundred thousand package was taken, the other was left behind."

"You did not tell me this before."

"No, I had forgotten myself; but when I found the package returned I recalled that the bonds had been in separate bundles."

"And this accounts for the fact that the two

hundred thousand were taken and the fifty thousand left behind?"

"Yes, sir."

"This mystery becomes deeper and deeper," said our hero.

"It does; and it confirms my theory all the same."

"Confirms your theory?"

"Yes."

"In what manner?"

"I said that Miss Tabor was innocent in fact, but not in deed."

"How is your theory confirmed?"

"Miss Tabor took those bonds, Miss Tabor returned them."

"Why do you so positively assume your statement to be true?"

"No one else could have taken and returned them."

"But you say yourself the party must know your safe combination?"

"Yes."

"Have you any reason to suppose that Miss Tabor is the party?"

"Yes."

"On what do you base your suspicion?"

"No one else could obtain the secret."

"And how could she obtain it?"

"I have not the least idea."

The detective commenced to laugh.

"Why do you laugh?"

"I will tell you. My good sir, you were not robbed at all!"

"Am I a fool or a knave?"

"Neither."

"Then why do you say I was not robbed at all?"

"Because I believe it. Yes, sir; my original theory is sustained."

"What theory?"

"You are a somnambulist."

"Nonsense!"

"It is true."

"No, sir; it is not true. Those bonds were stolen and returned."

"My dear sir, the proposition is preposterous! No thief would steal those bonds and get away with them so cleverly, and restore them. No, sir. And again; it required more skill to return them than it did to steal them originally."

"They were stolen all the same."

"Well, you have them back—that is all you desire."

"No, sir; it is not all I desire. I am now more anxious than ever to learn who stole those bonds, and I desire the proofs, and I will have them at any cost!"

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER Mr. Baker had departed, the detective sat down and carefully considered all the strange incidents. The last development—the return of the bonds—was a great surprise to him, and to a certain extent abolished a theory he had formed.

"Hang it!" he muttered, "it does now look as though that beautiful girl were, after all, the thief, or at least an accomplice of the thief. If the thief, it appears to me as though she suspected that she was under surveillance, and has returned the bonds. Indeed, it looks very black against her."

The detective reasoned a very probable case. The beautiful Ruth had indeed stolen the bonds, according to his latest theory, had kept them hidden until she discovered that she was being watched, when she returned them. Her strange conversation with our hero favored this last theory, and again he muttered:

"Can it be possible that the girl penetrated my disguise? Can it be possible that she really was the veiled woman who interviewed me three months ago, and has she deceived me and fallen to the suspicion that the professor, after all, is a detective? Well, well, we shall see. It does look as though she were deeper and smarter even than I credited her with being. It does seem that I have been deceived by a mere girl."

The detective got himself up in a good disguise—one different from any he had hitherto assumed. As has been intimated, he was a handsome man, and his appearance was really of the delicate order. He could easily get into the make-up of a woman, and as a woman he disguised himself, and then proceeded to the vicinity of Mr. Baker's house.

The morning hours were devoted to her duties with the children. The detective knew her habits well, and if Ruth went to the street it would be in the afternoon, and it was just about

the time that she would be apt to go out that the detective stationed himself on guard.

He had been on the watch about half an hour when he ejaculated:

"Just in time!"

The ejaculation was called forth by the fact that he saw Miss Tabor leave the house, and he watched her closely and made a discovery. He detected that she evidently suspected that she was being watched. She looked around furtively in every direction, and when she started off, after donning her veil, she made many dodges and turns, and at length entered a restaurant, and the officer laid for her. Several ladies passed in and out of the restaurant, which was one of those places opened for the convenience of ladies on shopping-tours. At length a lady came forth, and the detective again uttered an ejaculation:

"Great guns!" he cried, "she is guilty!"

A lady had come from the restaurant who was attired entirely different from the one he had been "dogging." But the moment his eyes rested upon her he recognized her as Ruth, and the conviction forced itself upon his mind that this beautiful girl, this seemingly innocent, artless Ruth Tabor, had actually worked a transform.

This last revelation was a blow to our hero: it appeared to fix the suspicion of her guilt beyond any question. A young lady who was up to the scheme of such a skillful and most excellent transform and disguise, was no innocent little darling by any means.

"I am sorry," muttered our hero; "but I will follow her up."

He did follow her up, and she went to the same quarter of the city where she had gone on a previous occasion. Here she waited a long time, but as upon her former visit she finally moved away without meeting any one. As she turned away, our hero, taking advantage of his own female disguise, followed close upon her heels, hoping to overhear some expression fall from her lips. But she was mute, and he followed her to her home, and later on sent a message to Mr. Baker that brought that gentleman to his lodgings.

"Mr. Baker," said our hero, "I have summoned you as a matter of kindness to give you some advice."

"Well, sir."

"I think it will be wise if you discharge Miss Tabor from your service."

Mr. Baker turned pale.

"What have you discovered?"

"I have discovered enough to warrant my advising you to send that girl away. You have recovered your bonds; you are at no loss; let her go."

"You have a revelation to make?"

"Well, yes."

"Let me hear it."

"I am convinced beyond question now that Miss Tabor is a thief, or, at least, associated with bad characters."

"She is not a thief. She may be the dupe of criminals."

"Under any circumstance it is better for you to send her off; and again, as a gentleman, I would advise you to dismiss all recollection of her from your mind."

"I can not do it."

"And will you harbor a criminal in your house?"

"I must have actual proof that she is a criminal before I send her away."

"I have done my duty, sir?"

"Yes."

"You will never accuse me of not having done so in this particular?"

"I never will. But what have you discovered?"

"I have made a strange discovery; but I have not obtained any positive proof of her guilt."

"You have made a discovery?"

"I have." And now, listen to me: do you wish me to still prosecute the investigation?"

"I do."

"Even though there is a prospect of establishing her guilt?"

"Yes."

"And proving her utterly unworthy?"

"Yes."

"And in face of the fact that you have recovered your stolen bonds?"

"Yes."

"Very well, sir; I will never warn or advise you again as concerns this girl. I tell you now to be prepared to learn, as the result of my investigation, that she is an experienced thief."

"If you do prove it, of course it will be a terrible blow to me; but I must know the truth."

"And you will keep her in your house when the truth is made plain?"

"I will—yes, sir. And I will confide to you that now I have another motive. I desire, if it does prove that she is a wicked girl, to carry out a scheme."

"You desire to carry out a scheme?"

"Yes."

"What is your scheme?"

"I desire to save her. Now tell me what you have discovered?"

"I have discovered that she is fully aware that she is being trailed."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"How did you discover the fact?"

"You know she went out to-day?"

"Yes."

"When she left your house she evinced an unmistakable knowledge of the fact that she was under surveillance."

"You are positive?"

"I am positive."

"I will admit that, under all the circumstances, that has a bad look; but you may be mistaken."

"I am not mistaken; I have the most positive proof."

"And yet the fact may be explained."

"There is one other fact that can not be explained."

"Name it."

"Miss Tabor, after she left your house, assumed a disguise."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE last statement of the detective was a cruel, staggering blow to Mr. Baker. His voice was husky as he demanded:

"You are sure?"

"I am."

"She really assumed a disguise?"

"She did."

"Under what circumstances?"

The detective related just what had occurred, and when he concluded, Mr. Baker remarked:

"This does assume a bad phase."

"Indeed, sir, it does," assented the detective.

"And yet she does seem so innocent and artless."

"It is a great enigma to me, Mr. Baker, I admit."

"You must continue to prosecute your investigations."

"And you will keep her in your house?"

"I will."

"All right, sir. I thought it my duty, as I said, to advise you, and now I will go ahead."

The detective was really glad that Mr. Baker had decided to keep Miss Tabor under his roof; but, as he had said, he did feel it his duty to give the advice he had spoken.

That same evening the detective was out upon the street. Indeed, he had another little affair on hand, and had decided to work up the case. He was out until after midnight, and had decided to return to his home, when suddenly he made a most singular and startling discovery. He met a young woman who was proceeding along closely veiled. The detective had been lost in a deep study, but the minute his eyes fell upon the lady he was all alive to the incident in hand.

"Well, well!" he muttered, "this is strange; but I have her now."

The lady whom our hero met was none other than Miss Tabor, and, as has been stated, at half an hour after midnight.

Tom started to follow the mysterious girl, and he did follow her until he saw her enter a large apartment house.

"I will wait until she comes forth, and then I will just face her," muttered our hero.

He laid in wait, and fully two hours passed, and it was well on toward three o'clock in the morning ere the young lady came forth, and then she appeared after having worked a second most remarkable transform. In fact, she came forth as a man.

"Well, well," muttered our hero, "this does beat anything I ever struck!"

He recognized Miss Tabor at a glance. Even male attire was not "cover" to him. He had a certain little "rush" on her which would enable him to recognize her under any circumstance. She was well got up, however. She wore a long ulster, a high hat, and carried a cane.

Tom started to follow his game, and he managed to keep her in sight until he made sure that she was going to Mr. Baker's house. He

had not closed in on her, as he had reasons to make sure as to the course she would take. But when fully assured that she was indeed returning to her home he walked rapidly and suddenly came upon her. He laid his hand upon her shoulder and said:

"One moment, miss."

The words had hardly left his lips when he received a dose of powder which a second time blinded him. He did not stop, however, to clear his eyes, but made a clutch at the girl, when he received a blow that caused him to reel, and when he recovered himself and cleared his eyes his daring assailant had disappeared.

"By all that's strange, remarkable, and miraculous," he muttered, "this is the climax! This beats all the other incidents of this whole mysterious affair!"

Tom Silver was at sea. It is not to his discredit that he had been successfully powdered a second time, as he had no reason to look for such a startling *dénouement*. He did not up to that moment really believe that it was Miss Tabor who had dosed him upon a former occasion. It did not seem possible that she could have got to the street so soon after he had seen her in Mr. Baker's parlor; and again, Mr. Baker had gained his confidence, and he had come to believe that gentleman's statement when he declared that Miss Tabor had not left the house that night. And we will admit that every incident really did favor the gentleman's declaration; but when our hero got the second dose the whole affair assumed a different aspect.

Tom knew the destination of Miss Tabor, and therefore he did not attempt to follow her. Having failed in seizing her, there was nothing further to be gained upon that occasion.

The detective returned to his lodgings, lost in deep thought, and he muttered:

"Well, well, this affair becomes deeper under shadow every step I take. What does it mean? Is the game against me, and is Mr. Baker at the bottom of it, or—"

A moment he hesitated, as a singular suspicion flashed through his mind, and in slow tones he finally concluded:

"Is the whole little game tentative, is there a preparatory scheme in progress, is there a real victim to whom I have not yet been introduced, and is it a game to make me a witness in, or some deeper game that is being played? I shall see."

Tom went to his home, and went to sleep; but in the morning he received a call from Mr. Baker. That gentleman was greatly excited. Tom decided to let the gentleman work his game, for, in truth, our hero had reached the conclusion that Mr. Baker was playing a game, and a very deep one.

"I have a most startling disclosure to make," said our hero's visitor.

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes."

Mr. Baker was laboring under great excitement. Indeed, his excitement amounted to agitation.

"I am listening," said Tom.

"Last night," commenced Mr. Baker, "I lay awake thinking, indeed I will admit that I pass sleepless nights almost continually now."

"It is not strange, sir."

"No, it is not strange; but, sir, I am almost convinced now that your conclusions are correct. I fear I am harboring in my house an accomplished criminal."

"Proceed, sir, and relate what it is that has so disturbed you?"

"Well, sir, last night, as I said, I was unable to sleep, and I think it must have been well on to three o'clock in the morning when I arose and descended to my library. I became very restless, and lowering the light I walked to the front parlor and stood looking out upon the street. Suddenly I saw a man come running lively along the sidewalk, and imagine my surprise when he ran up my stoop. I was amazed, and at first made a move to go to the door, but I changed my mind just in time, and I decided to wait and watch, because it came to me that I was about to solve at least one mystery."

CHAPTER XVII.

The detective did not interrupt Mr. Baker, or make any comments, or even say "Proceed," when that gentleman halted, as though expecting to be urged to proceed; and after a moment he resumed:

"Yes, I thought that at last I would certainly solve one of the mysteries."

"And did you?" said our hero.

"You remember that I told you that upon

one occasion I made sure that there was a man in Miss Tabor's room?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, sir, the moment I saw that man run up my stoop I muttered, 'There he is!' Yes, sir, I struck the suspicion just in time to resolve to lay low and wait, and I did lay low. I ran to the library and extinguished the lamp. I had only my slippers on my feet, and I moved about noiselessly. I returned to the parlor door just in time to be assured that the man had entered my house; and I also became aware that he was noiselessly ascending the stairs. You can imagine the feelings of excitement that agitated me, and my first impulse was to run up and confront him, but I determined not to do so."

"It was better to watch, sir."

"Yes, as it proved, it was very fortunate that I did not carry out my first intentions. I waited a few moments and then stole up the stairs. I decided that the singular circumstances warranted my playing the rôle of eavesdropper, and I moved with great caution. I reached the floor on which Miss Tabor's room is situated. I looked through the key-hole. The light was only feebly turned on. I peeped in, and I made a most strange and startling discovery—yes, sir, the most wonderful and startling discovery of my life."

"What did you discover?" asked the detective.

"Can you guess?"

"Did you see Miss Tabor rush into the man's arms?"

"No."

"Well, what did you discover?"

"There was no man there."

"Eh?" ejaculated our hero.

"There was no man there," repeated Mr. Baker.

"Aha! he eluded you, after all?"

"Yes, and in the most remarkable manner."

"Well, sir, how?"

"You will never believe it."

"Proceed; I am curious."

"The man was Miss Tabor."

"Sir!" again ejaculated our hero.

"It was no man at all."

"No man at all?"

"No, sir."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Just what I say."

"But you saw the man enter?"

"Yes."

"And now you say it was not a man?"

"No."

"What was it—a ghost?"

"No."

"A double?"

"No."

"Sir, you must tell me. I will not guess."

"It was Miss Tabor herself."

"Miss Tabor herself?" repeated our hero.

"Yes."

"I do not understand."

"You told me yesterday that Miss Tabor was skillful in making a disguise."

"I did."

"It was Ruth who entered my house, disguised as a man."

"Nonsense!"

"It is true."

"You are sure?"

"I'm sure."

"No, sir; you have been deceived."

"I have not been deceived."

"You have been dreaming again."

"No, sir; I have not been dreaming!"

"How do you know you were not dreaming?"

"I am sure I was not. I can prove that I was not."

"How?"

"The disguise is still in that room."

"It is?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I do know. Yes, sir; I was not dreaming, and that beautiful and artless girl, seemingly, is in reality an accomplished criminal."

"You must be mistaken, Mr. Baker."

"I am not; let me tell you. Under her ulster she wore her female attire. It was a skillful disguise, but a hurried one. In the broad light of day it would not have served nor would it had she entered a room, but on the street at midnight she could have passed for a man—a little dandy—for she carried a cane and wore a high hat."

"And what do you think of this, Mr. Baker?"

"I do not know what to think; but I am heart-broken."

"You are?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Baker, let me tell you something—I believe you are deceiving me."

"Deceiving you, sir?"

"Yes."

"Why should I seek to deceive you?"

"Ah, that is something I am yet to learn."

"On my honor I am not seeking to deceive you, sir."

"On your honor?"

"Yes, sir, on my honor."

"I desire to once again ask you if by any possibility Miss Tabor could have got out of your house that first night I visited you?"

"She might have done so after we had all retired, not within two hours after your departure."

Our hero looked Mr. Baker square in the face. He did not look nor act like a man who was lying, and again our hero himself could not see how the girl could have got to the street so soon. The latter fact always had obtruded itself.

"This is all very strange, Mr. Baker."

"Mr. Silver," said the gentleman, "there is one thing I will ask at your hands."

"Well, sir?"

"Investigate my character."

"Why should I, sir?"

"Because I now perceive that you look upon me with suspicion."

"You will admit all the incidents of this affair are very strange?"

"Yes, sir, they are; but on my honor I am telling you the truth, and everything I have told you was the truth."

"Then, sir, I must say it is the most strange and wonderful series of adventures ever brought to the attention of a detective."

"Yes, sir; and we must solve the mystery."

"We will," came the answer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Once again the detective was left to his own meditations, and he was a perplexed man. He did believe Mr. Baker's statements, despite the singular contradictory incidents which existed.

Tom Silver thought over all the indices from the first, and finally he concluded to work on a new theory. He had taken the bearings of the house into which he had seen Miss Tabor go on the previous night, and he determined to go around and do a little "shadowing" in that direction. Tom got himself up in a good disguise and started in, and it was still in the forenoon when he arrived in the vicinity of the big tenement house, and he had been on the lookout but a few moments when he fell to a startling discovery. A man came from the house, and he acted in a singular manner; he acted like a dodger. Our hero could not remember ever having seen the man before, and yet his face did appear familiar. The man, after looking up and down the street in a furtive manner, started off, and our hero fell to his train and shadowed the fellow until he saw him enter a notorious sporting house. The detective stood meditating as to his next move, when, as good luck would have it, he recognized an old city detective approaching—an officer who was well acquainted with the features of about every criminal character in New York. As his *confère* drew near, Tom signaled him, and said:

"Halloo, old fellow! I want your aid a moment."

"What's up?"

"An identification."

"All right. Where's your mug?"

"In here."

Tom pointed to the sporting house.

"A good place for the daisies," came the answer.

The two detectives entered the house, but ere doing so detective number two worked one of those marvelous "transforms" which would fill the soul of the personator of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" with envy. Having worked the change, as stated, the two officers entered the resort, and there sat the man whom Tom was "shadowing."

Our hero indicated his game, and the two officers merely stopped at the bar a moment, and then returned to the street.

"Do you recognize him?" asked Tom.

"Do I recognize him? Well, I should say I did!"

"Who is he?"

"The most expert safe sneak-thief and burglar

sneak-thief in the world. That fellow is the famous '—'."

Tom gave a start, and ejaculated.

"Great guns!"

"Are you on to him?" asked detective number two.

"Only as a side light."

"If it's a safe-robbery case you can bet your bottom dollar that man is into the game."

Detective number two went away, and Tom was left a few moments for further consideration, and we must admit he was surprised. He was at length confronted with the deadest evidence, as the phrase goes, as concerned the unquestioned guilt and criminality of the beautiful Miss Ruth Tabor.

This confirmatory evidence was a crushing blow to our hero. Tom was a good-hearted fellow, and it actually came as a personal calamity this almost certain evidence of the young lady's guilt.

"It is useless," he muttered, "to entertain further hope of establishing her innocence, and yet it still presents itself as the strangest case on record. All the incidents point to her guilt, and against all the incidents still remains the fact that there is not one evil line in her face. There does not appear to exist a motive, and the return of those bonds is the most remarkable feature in the whole case after all."

Tom thought and thought, and at length determined to try a little trick. He had secured from Mr. Baker a photograph of Ruth Tabor; indeed, at our hero's instigation Mr. Baker had pilfered the *carte de visite*. Having decided upon his plan, Tom entered the place, and waited around, seeking an opportunity to get on speaking terms with the man, who was known as Johnson. But a few moments had elapsed ere Tom discovered that the man was on the alert. Our hero was not well known to the criminals in New York, and that was one reason why he had been brought on as a secret special.

"Hang it!" muttered the detective, "that fellow suspects me, and is on his guard."

Our hero had about reached the conclusion indicated, when he was surprised to have the man approach him.

"A nice day," said the thief.

"Yes," answered Tom.

"Sit over here and take a drink with me."

Tom obeyed.

The refreshments were ordered, and to Tom's astonishment Johnson suddenly and most abruptly asked, in a low tone:

"What's your game? Are you set for me?"

The question was a significant and meaning one to our hero, who answered:

"No."

"Don't try to play me."

"I am not seeking to play you."

"You were in here with the Gypsy."

The Gypsy to whom the thief alluded was the detective number two, who had identified Johnson.

"Yes, I was in here with the Gypsy."

"And you had him on to me?"

Tom concluded it was better to open right up to a certain extent, and he said:

"Well, yes, I did have him on to you."

"Well, Mister Man, it's time lost; I'm clean on the record. I've been in no fresh snaps; I've nothing to fear."

"Not from me."

"Then why are you on to me?"

"You only came in incidentally."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"How do I come in?"

Our hero smiled.

"Oh, give it to me straight."

"I will."

"Let it come."

"You lodge at—"

Tom named the house from whence he had seen the man emerge.

"Yes, I lodge there; I live there with my wife."

"Your wife?"

"Yes."

"I've got that house under the shadows."

"Am I the moving figure?"

"No."

"Honor bright?"

"Yes."

"Then how is it you started to my trail?"

"I was on the lookout when you came forth this morning."

"Yes?"

"You were on the alert."

"That's so."

"Your motions attracted my attention."

"I see."

"I set you down for 'differ.'"

"All right."

"I had never seen you before."

"Well?"

"I took it you might prove a side-light."

"Ah! I see."

"That's all straight and square, is it not?"

"Certainly—if you are not lying."

"No need to lie."

"You came back after the identification?"

"I did."

"You desired to get on to me?"

"I did."

"I saw that, and I thought I'd help you."

"You were very kind."

"Well, what is it you want?"

Tom thought a moment. Indeed, he went over all the probabilities, and finally decided upon his course, and he struck in with good shot.

CHAPTER XIX.

ENOUGH had transpired between our detective and the thief to indicate to the former how to proceed. No man understood better the character of a fellow like Johnson. There was no booty to be recovered; restitution had been made. It was a peculiar case. Indeed, all our hero desired to do was to establish Ruth Tabor's connection with Johnson, or prove her innocence. As has been indicated, the detective decided to start right in, and taking the photograph from his pocket, he said:

"Who is that gal?"

Johnson gazed at the picture a moment, and varying expressions passed over his strongly marked face.

"Watch me closely," he said, with a laugh.

"I will."

"But you can't make anything."

"That won't do."

"I give it to you straight."

"See here, Johnson, if you have a clear record, why were you on the alert this morning when you started out?"

"There's a woman on the lay for me."

"A woman?"

"Yes."

"Is that the gal?"

The detective used the vulgar appellation with a purpose.

"No, that ain't the gal."

"Who is that gal?"

Again there came a smile to the bank-robber's face.

"This won't do, my covey," he said.

"Why not?"

"Bah! why don't you come right out?"

"I'm out."

"What innocent girl is this you are using for a stall?"

"You know the gal."

"Do I?"

"Yes."

Again the man laughed, and said:

"If you want to work me come it square. Don't seek to play me after there has been a shot fired."

"Do you know the lady?"

"No."

"Is this straight?"

"Yes, it is."

"Did you ever see her?"

"What's the use? The original of that picture is an angel. You are using her for a stall."

"You never saw her?"

"Never."

"You swear?"

"Yes, I do."

"Why not come right out?"

"I am right out. I never saw the gal, and you know I never did. Now, what are you really after? That gal is no company for a man like me, and you know it."

The detective was a little set back, although in his own mind he felt assured that Johnson was giving him a steer.

"You can make a friend of me, old man," said Tom.

"I'd like to; but I can't on this lay."

"You never saw that face?"

"Never."

Johnson had taken only a cursory glance at the picture, but in a mechanical sort of way he looked at it again, and then gave a sudden start, and a look of interest came to his eyes.

"Hold on," he said.

"Well?"

"As I look more closely at that face it does

strike me that it is familiar, but on my honor I can not tell how I got the impression."

"Try and think."

Johnson made a study of the picture, and finally said:

"I give it up; but I may have something to tell you to-morrow."

"Will you meet me to-morrow?"

"Yes, I will."

"And let me into a point if you can?"

"Yes, I will; and now listen to me: on my honor I've no game in with the original of that picture. If that girl is a 'dipper' she don't go into the same 'well' with me, I'll give that straight, and if I can get on to anything as concerns that girl you can have it. I've an idea I'll say nothing now; to-morrow I may let you know something."

"Why not to-night?"

"All right, I'll meet you to-night, and I may have something for you; but can I have the loan of this picture?"

It was an odd request that Johnson made, but the detective for reasons determined to grant it, and he said:

"Yes, I will loan you the picture. If you play against me you will be sorry some day. If you work in with me you may throw an anchor to windward."

"Good! I'll toss the anchor to windward if I can."

The two men separated, and when Tom was once more alone he began to think.

"Hang it!" he said, "that fellow appeared to be giving it to me straight."

A few moments later Tom saw Johnson leave the resort, and he again fell to the fellow's trail, but at long range, as he did not desire to let Johnson know he was on his heels. The man proceeded to his home, and Tom made a break in another direction. He had determined to face straight for a given point. Another transform was assumed, and our hero proceeded direct to the residence of Mr. Baker. He was gotten up as an old man, and he muttered as he walked along:

"I've got a 'pointer.' The man may have succeeded in giving me a 'throw-off,' but we will see what the woman can do."

The detective rang the bell of Mr. Baker's house, and when the servant came to the door Tom smiled on him benevolently, and asked:

"Is there a young lady living here by the name of Tabor—Miss Ruth Tabor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is she at home?"

"She is, sir."

"I'd like to see the young lady; I've come a long way."

"Have you a card?"

The detective was prepared, as far as the card was concerned, but the servant still hesitated and did not ask him in.

"You may take that card to Mr. Baker, if you choose."

"Is it Mr. Baker you wish to see, or the young lady?"

"I desire to see the young lady."

"Will you walk in?"

Our hero was shown into the parlor, and the servant went straight to the library, where Mr. Baker sat reading. He passed the card to his employer, and said:

"That gentleman desires to speak with Miss Tabor."

"Where is Miss Tabor?"

"With the children in the nursery."

"Wait a moment, John."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Baker stepped into the parlor. There was a little mark on the card that served as a signal to Mr. Baker.

"You are here, sir?"

"Yes."

"What is the game now?"

"I desire to see Miss Tabor."

"Have you any special news?"

"No; and the lady must not know that you have spoken to me."

CHAPTER XX.

TOM SILVER was indeed advancing toward a solution of the mystery link by link.

Mr. Baker took the hint and retired from the room. The servant awaited him, and he said:

"John, deliver the card, and do not let Miss Tabor know that you brought it to me first."

"All right, sir."

The servant ascended to the nursery and delivered the card to Miss Tabor. The young lady glanced at it and turned pale.

"The gentleman is waiting to see you in the parlor, miss."

"What sort of looking man is he, John?"

"A nice, kind-looking old gentleman, miss."

"And you are sure he asked for me?"

"Yes, miss."

The young lady was trembling violently, but, after a moment, she said:

"I will go down and see the gentleman. Is Mr. Baker at home?"

"Yes, miss; he is in his room."

A few moments passed and Ruth descended to the parlor.

The detective advanced toward her, and said:

"This is Miss Tabor?"

"That is my name, sir."

"Mr. Johnson sent me here."

"Mr. Johnson?" exclaimed the lady.

"Yes."

"I do not recall any acquaintance named Johnson. This must be a mistake."

"No, miss; it is no mistake. Mr. Johnson sent me here."

"I certainly do not know Mr. Johnson."

"It's strange."

"I do not know him; indeed, sir, I have but few acquaintances here in the city."

"Mr. Johnson lives at —"

The detective located the house in which he had seen Miss Tabor enter the previous night, and the moment he did he saw the girl give a violent start. There came a ghastly look to her face, and her eyes gleamed with a wild terror.

"I do not know the gentleman."

"He says you were at his house last night."

The girl staggered back. Indeed, it was pitiful to look at her beautiful face, convulsed as it was with terror, and for a moment she was unable to reply; and when she did recover sufficiently to speak, her tones were actually husky.

"There is some grievous mistake here," she muttered.

"What do you mean, miss?"

"I do not know the gentleman."

"You do not know him?"

"I do not."

"You never met him, miss?"

"I never met him. It is all a mystery to me."

"Were you not at that house?"

"I was."

"You were at that house?"

"Yes."

"May I ask your errand there?"

"Does it concern you, sir, or Mr. Johnson?"

Ruth was recovering her nerve.

"It may aid in solving the mystery."

"What mystery, sir?"

"If Mr. Johnson does not know you and you do not know Mr. Johnson, why should he send me here?"

"Who is Mr. Johnson, sir?"

"You really do not know him?"

"I do not."

"Mr. Johnson is a notorious bank-thief and safe-robber."

The detective dropped his voice to a whisper as he spoke. The girl stood a moment gazing like one suddenly transfixed, but soon she again recovered and asked:

"Who are you, sir?"

"I'm a detective."

Our hero had decided upon his course, and was striking straight from the shoulder, and his last blow appeared to strike with terrific force, as the fair girl recoiled.

"You are a detective, sir?"

"I am."

"This is all very strange, sir. Yes, there must be some mistake."

"There is no mistake about my being a detective, miss."

"No; but I do not know Mr. Johnson; I never heard of the man, and how should I have an acquaintance with a man whom you say is a safe-robber?"

"I am not at liberty, miss, to explain, but it is strange that Johnson would send me to you and not be acquainted with you."

"He has made a mistake."

"It is possible, miss, and probably you can explain how he came to make the mistake?"

"I can not."

"Mr. Johnson lives at —"

"I do not know where he lives."

"You will admit you visited that house?"

"I did."

"And you went there after midnight?"

The beautiful Ruth looked as though she were about to faint. She made no answer.

"You went there after midnight and it was

well on toward morning when you departed from that house."

The girl still stood motionless and speechless.

"You entered the house as a lady; you retired from it disguised as a man."

Tom was indeed driving straight home, and the girl writhed under his startling declarations.

"Miss Tabor, the appearances are dead against you. Some explanation is necessary."

"Is this Mr. Johnson accused of any special crime?"

"He is under suspicion."

"Under suspicion only?"

"Yes."

"And what is it he is suspected of having done?"

"He is suspected of having robbed a safe."

"And am I under suspicion?"

"You were seen visiting that house."

"Is it a crime to visit a house?"

"No; but it is a matter of suspicion when a young lady visits a house inhabited by a thief. When she enters that house as a lady and departs from it far into the small hours as a man, you will admit yourself that some explanation is in order."

"I can explain."

"I hope you can."

"I can."

"Do so."

"I went to visit a friend."

"Why should you go to visit a friend at such an hour?"

"There came a hasty summons to me."

"That might be; but why should you leave that friend's house under a disguise?"

"I am a woman."

"Well?"

"It was, as you say, long after midnight."

"Yes."

"I had no escort."

"Proceed."

"It is dangerous for a young lady to be seen going through the streets at such an hour."

"It is."

"And my friend suggested, as a matter of safety, that I should assume a disguise."

"What you say all seems fair enough, Miss Tabor, but I have one more question to ask, and on your answer depends a full explanation."

CHAPTER XXI.

THERE followed a moment's silence; the beautiful girl's features were like marble, and her eyes shone with a preternatural brilliancy. It was indeed a trying ordeal. In slow measured tones the detective at length asked:

"Whom did you go to visit at that house?"

The girl did not answer.

"Answer my question and all may be explained."

"I did not go to visit any one named Johnson, and I swear I do not know such a person. The only party I know in that house is the friend I went to visit."

"Will you name your friend?"

"I will not."

"Why not?"

"It might not be agreeable to my friend."

"But your friend can not find fault when you are compelled to use her name for your own vindication."

"I can not mention my friend's name."

"You refuse to vindicate yourself?"

"I do."

Tom Silver rose and said:

"I am sorry."

"Will you arrest me?" demanded Miss Tabor.

"Not at present. I must inquire further into this matter, but I do hope you will conclude to make an explanation."

"I have no explanation to make; I do not know Mr. Johnson. I never heard of the man until you mentioned his name here."

Tom Silver thought that he had gone far enough for one visit, and he said:

"I will see you again, miss."

Miss Tabor made no answer and quietly left the room, and after she had ascended the stairs Mr. Baker rejoined the detective.

"Well, sir, what now?" he asked.

"I am proceeding, sir, link by link."

"Have you made any discoveries?"

"No."

"Have you verified any of your theories?"

"I think I am letting in a little light on my theories."

"You have put Miss Tabor under a trying ordeal."

"I have?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think so?"

"I saw her face as she left the room."

"Well?"

"I pitied her."

"So did I, sir."

"I can not believe her guilty."

"This whole affair is an enigma. As I advance I am the more and more perplexed. The case presents the most extraordinary phases."

"It certainly does, and I trust you will soon solve the mystery. I suffer."

"You suffer?"

"I do; but it is terrible for me to be a witness of the sufferings of Ruth."

"You think she suffers?"

"I do; and, what is more, I am now fully convinced that she is innocent, absolutely innocent. As you say, these phases of the case are so strange, they lead me to hope that Ruth is innocent. If she were a criminal the developments would be different, I think."

"How different?"

"I can not explain exactly; but the agony I saw written upon her face a moment ago was not one of terror produced from a consciousness of detection. It was agony that girl is suffering for another."

The detective smiled.

"You have suspected as much before, sir?"

"The direct incidents point toward her guilt. The side phases of this remarkable case would suggest her innocence."

"Oh, that the mystery could be solved!"

"It shall be solved."

"Soon?"

"I think I am drawing toward a solution."

"May you succeed!"

The detective went away, and an hour later he met the man Johnson.

"I've got on to it," said the safe-robber.

"Well, what is it?"

"The photograph."

"Yes."

"The original of that picture did live in the same house where I reside."

"Did live there?"

"Yes."

"Where is she now?"

"She has gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"How and when?"

"She hired a furnished room. After my departure this morning an expressman came and carried off her trunk."

"You say she hired a furnished room?"

"Yes."

"From whom?"

"A woman who leases a suite of apartments."

"Do you know this woman?"

"No, but I've my suspicions."

"Your suspicions?"

"Yes."

"What do you suspect?"

"She ain't regular, that's all."

"Her name?"

"She goes under the name of Simonet."

"Simonet?"

"Yes."

"What countrywoman is she?"

"I should say she was a French woman."

The detective was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"I am much obliged to you, Johnson. I will see you later. Which floor does the Simonet woman occupy?"

"The fifth."

"The whole floor?"

"Yes."

"Good. You have done me a good turn."

The detective proceeded to the house where Johnson resided. He ascended to the fifth floor, and knocked at the door of the first room. The door was opened by a woman a little past fifty years of age. She possessed a very striking face.

"This is Mrs. Simonet?"

"That is my name, sir."

"Madame, will you permit me to enter your room? I have some questions to ask you."

"You are welcome to enter, sir."

The detective entered the room and was invited to take a seat. He had run his eyes all over the woman. The man Johnson had said she was not regular. The detective thought differently. She appeared to him to be a very honest and really reputable woman.

"Madame, you had a tenant here?"

The woman did exhibit a little nervousness as she answered:

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your tenant?"

"She has gone away."

"Where has she gone?"
 "I do not know."
 "What do you know about her?"
 "Nothing."
 "How long had she lived with you?"
 "About one month."
 "Why did she leave?"
 "I do not know."
 "While she was with you did you observe anything strange about her?"
 "No, sir. She appeared a very quiet creature; went out but little, and never had any visitors."
 The detective appeared to be thinking a moment, and then said:
 "Did you know her before she came to live with you?"
 "No, sir."
 "Did she bring any testimonials or references when she engaged your rooms?"
 "No, sir; I did not demand any."

CHAPTER XXII.

"MADAME, I'd like to ask a favor. I desire to inspect the apartments occupied lately by your tenant."
 "That is a strange request, sir."
 "I am a detective, madame."
 "You are a detective?" repeated the woman.
 "I am."
 "Is the lady about whom you are inquiring accused of crime?"
 "No, madame; but good friends are very anxious to secure some information concerning her."
 "Come this way, sir."
 The woman led the detective into a small middle room.
 "This is the room the lady occupied."
 "Under what name did she hire this room?"
 "As Mrs. Clark."
 "Mrs. Clark?"
 "Yes."
 "She was a married lady?"
 "Yes, sir; so she represented herself to be."
 The detective looked around the room and then opened several drawers in a bureau. The room had been let furnished; the drawers were all empty.
 "Did the lady's husband reside with her?"
 "No, sir."
 "Did she have any gentlemen visitors when she was here?"
 "No, sir."
 "You never saw a gentleman call?"
 "I never did."

While talking the detective's eyes were wandering about in every direction, and suddenly his eyes fell upon a little piece of cardboard that lay between the flooring and the carpet. He stooped down and seized it, and drew forth a photograph, and his heart stood still—it was a portrait of Ruth Tabor!

The woman saw the act, and stood pale and trembling.
 "This is a portrait of your late tenant, madame?"

The woman looked at the picture, and said:
 "Yes, sir."
 "And she lived with you about a month?"
 "Yes."
 "And she seldom went out?"
 "Seldom, sir."
 "Madame, you are deceiving me."
 "On my honor, sir, I am telling the truth. I have no purpose in deceiving you."
 "You say this lady seldom went out?"
 "Very seldom, sir."
 "Did you ever suspect that she had two residences?"

"Never, sir."
 "Madame, I can not compel you to tell me the truth, but it will be better for you and for the lady if you do tell me the truth."
 "I am telling you the truth, sir."
 "On your honor?"
 "I am."

The detective held the picture in his hand, and he was about to say something when there came a loud knock at the outer door of the front room. The woman turned pale. The detective's suspicions were aroused, and he said:

"Madame, you have a caller."
 "Yes, sir."
 "Go and see who your visitor is. I will remain here."
 "I can let you out through the rear door, sir."

"I prefer to remain here. I am an officer. You need not fear me. You know who your visitor is?"
 "I do not, sir."

There came a second very loud knock.
 "Go open the door, madame; let me remain here."

The woman was deeply excited, but she left the room, and proceeding to the front apartment, opened the door. Our hero took up a position from where he could see who entered the room. He saw the door open and a very handsome-faced man enter. The man was excited and his dark eyes glittered.

"Good-day, madame,"
 The man spoke in broken English. The detective could see the woman's face, and he could see that she was agitated and really terrorized.

The man had walked straight into the room, and without ceremony he seated himself.

"Madame, you have a lodger here?"

"No, I live alone."
 "You live alone?"

"I do."
 "You must not lie to me. You have a lady lodging here."

"No, sir; I have no lady lodging here."

"Madame, do not seek to deceive me. I shall search your rooms. You may as well confess at once."

"I have nothing to confess."

"The lady I seek is my wife, madame. She lives here. I have the proof."

"What is your name, sir?"

"It matters not about my name; I seek my wife."

"You will have to go somewhere else to find your wife, sir."

"I know she is here."
 "There is no one here."

"Be careful; do not seek to deceive me."

Our hero was a listener to the whole conversation.

"Will you permit me to go look through your rooms?"

Tom Silver had the door partly open. He could see the woman, and as she glanced toward the door in terror, knowing that our hero was there, the latter signaled her to permit the man to enter the rooms and make a search.

"I tell you, sir, there is no lady in this house."

"If I find no lady, no harm will be done."

"But why should I permit a stranger to go through my rooms?"

"Madame, I seek my wife."

"Your wife is not here."

"Let me satisfy myself and I will go away."

"Very well, sir, you can search if you please."

The detective passed to the rear room, went around, and appeared at the door of the front room, where he knocked. Just as the woman's second visitor passed to look through the apartments, the detective was admitted, and the woman saw through his clever trick.

"Do you know this man?"

"No."

"You never saw him before?"

"Never."

"I will remain here and deal with him. You can introduce me as a friend; you need have no fear."

The woman was really glad to have a male present, as she had evidently been greatly terrified by visitor Number Two.

The stranger was gone some moments, and then returned to the room where our hero and the woman sat. He betrayed surprise upon beholding our hero, and the lady said:

"This is a friend, sir."

The man grunted, and said:

"My wife is not here?"

"I told you, sir, that there were no ladies in this house save myself."

"But you did not tell me all the truth. My wife has been here; where has she gone?"

"I know nothing about your wife, sir."

The man looked toward our hero, and said:

"Mister, I seek my wife. Am I wrong?"

"No, I can not say any man is wrong when seeking for his wife under ordinary circumstances; but how is it you are compelled to seek for your wife?"

"She ran away from me."

"Possibly she had cause."

"No, she had no cause, save that some one lied about me. Do you know where I can find my wife?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

TOM SILVER had oftentimes remarked that the case he was engaged in presented extraordinary phases, and within a few moments even more remarkable phases had been adduced.

"Your wife is not here."

"She has been here."
 "How do you know?"
 "I know; and I will find her."
 The man moved toward the door, but he turned and said:

"Madame, if you will not tell me where my wife is I will find her, and then I will attend to you. It would be better for you if you were to tell me the truth."

"I have nothing to tell you, sir."

"We shall see, madame, we shall see."

The man rushed from the room; the detective followed him after having first remarked:

"I will return, madame, and see you later."

The man who was seeking his wife had reached the street. Our hero, however, managed to overtake him and touched him on the shoulder. The man turned and demanded:

"What do you want?"

"To speak a word with you."

"You are the man who was with the woman up there?"

The man pointed toward Mrs. Simonet's apartments.

"Yes, I was there, sir."

"What do you want?"

"Is this a picture of your wife?"

Our hero handed the man the photograph of Miss Tabor. The fellow glanced at it, and there came a terrible expression to his face, and he quickly drew a stiletto, and would have made a slash at the detective, but Tom was an old hand under such circumstances, and he covered the man with a pistol and said:

"Hand me the dagger—handle toward me—or you are a dead man!"

There was blood in our hero's eyes, and the husband, so called, did pass over the knife, and as he did so he said:

"You must excuse me; I am mad."

"You may find me a friend."

"A friend?"

"Yes."

"If you are a friend, what are you doing with the portrait of my wife?"

"Is that a portrait of your wife?"

"It is. How did it come into your possession?"

"I just received it from that woman."

"You just received it from that woman?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"I am a detective."

"A police officer?"

"I am."

"Why did the woman give you the picture?"

"She did not give it to me."

"You said she did."

"I found it in the apartment where the original lodged."

"Then my wife did lodge there?"

"Is that a picture of your wife?"

"Yes."

"I may help you to find your wife."

"Will you?"

"On one condition; you must tell me all about yourself, and why your wife has fled from you."

"She fled from me because some one lied to her."

"You are not an American?"

"No."

"And your wife?"

"She is an American woman."

"Where were you married?"

"In Paris."

"Under what circumstances?"

"My wife was a governess. I met her and married her. I love her. She ran away from me. I have searched a year to find her."

"How did you learn she lived in that house?"

"I can not tell; but I traced her there. Do you know my wife?"

"I think I have seen her."

"Where?"

"I will not tell you now; but listen to me have you one of your own photographs?"

"Yes."

"Will you loan one to me?"

"Why should I?"

"It will help me to find your wife."

"Do you seek my wife?"

"Yes."

"You seek her?"

"Yes."

"And you are an officer?"

"Yes."

"Why do you seek her?"

"I have been employed to do so."

"You have been employed to do so?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"The family with whom she lived when you made her your wife."

"They seek her?"

"Yes."

"They are my enemies."

"Will you loan me your photograph?"

"I will see; come with me."

Tom Silver had hit it good when he accounted for his interest in this man's wife by saying that he had been employed to find her by the people with whom she had lived at the time of her marriage.

"You wish me to go with you?" said Tom.

"Yes."

"Where shall I go?"

"To my lodgings."

"Why do you wish me to go with you?"

"I will tell you later on."

"What is your name, sir?"

"My name is Henri Dalsinet."

"And your wife's name is—"

"Marie Dalsinet."

"What was her name when you married her?"

"Why should I tell you?"

"You seek your wife?"

"I do."

"I may aid you in finding her."

"Her name was Tabor when I married her."

"And she ran away from you?"

"Yes."

"That is strange."

"The people with whom she lived hated me, and at the last moment—yes, within an hour after our marriage—they succeeded in convincing her by falsehood that I was an unworthy man."

"My friend, yours is a very strange story."

"It is; but my story is true. Come with me."

"I can not go with you now, but at some future time I will go with you; or, better, meet me to-morrow."

"Why should I meet you?"

"I may have some news for you."

Our hero had a purpose in view. He did not desire to go with the man Dalsinet. He desired to follow the fellow, and, in detective parlance, "get on to him unawares."

"You think you may have news for me?"

"Yes."

"You may be my enemy."

"No."

"You may work against me."

"No."

"Listen: if you do you will be sorry."

"You need not threaten me."

"Where shall I meet you?"

"Here."

"When?"

"To-night."

"At what hour?"

"Ten o'clock."

"I will meet you."

The detective walked away, and his mind was full; indeed, he had made great progress. There was, as he expressed it, "a heap of lying somewhere," but he was determined to get at the truth. The mystery still prevailed, but he was getting the key to the mystery—yes, forging a chain of evidence link by link.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TOM SILVER was on his guard. He did not return immediately to the rooms of Mrs. Simonet, but struck off on a mislead, and had not gone two squares before his suspicion was confirmed. The man Dalsinet was on his track, was following him, and what was still more remarkable, the fellow had worked a transform.

"That fellow is a scoundrel," muttered Tom, "and a very desperate fellow. He claims to be a Frenchman. He lies, he is not a Frenchman; but as I live I believe he is a West Indian octopus, and great guns! to think that the scamp is really the husband of that fair and beautiful Ruth Tabor, and to think also that she is a married woman. Poor Baker! what a blow this will be to him when he comes to know the truth, and yet—"

The detective stopped a moment, and a queer look came over his face, and he muttered:

"Yes, yes, it may be—it may be. We shall see."

Tom made up his mind that he did not wish to spend the balance of the afternoon dodging the man Dalsinet, and he just laid for a chance, worked a transform, and gave the fellow a quick dodge. Having got rid of his pursuer, our hero made his way back to the rooms of Mrs. Simonet, and a few moments later he stood once again in that lady's presence

"Madame," he said, "you know more than you have revealed to me."

"You know it all now, sir."

"I know nothing."

"Yes, sir; you know it all."

"I do not know where to find Mrs. Dalsinet."

"Neither do I, sir."

"Nonsense!"

"It is the truth."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

"When did she leave here?"

"She left here early this morning."

"But she told you where she was going?"

"She did not."

"Did that man ever visit here before?"

"Never."

"And do you really believe he is the lady's husband?"

"I have every reason to believe he is the lady's husband."

"The lady who was your lodger?"

"Yes, sir."

"While she was here did she make a confidante of you?"

"To a limited extent."

"What did she tell you?"

"If you had not seen that man I would not tell you."

"But I have seen that man, and you can tell me all you know."

"I know but little, but I have reason to believe she had a suspicion that this man had discovered her whereabouts, and that is why she left here."

"What did she tell you?"

"When she first came here to engage her room she said that she was a married woman, and that her husband was in Europe. I would not have taken her without references were it not that she looked like an innocent and honorable woman. I believe she is an honest woman."

"But she confided in you?"

"To a limited extent."

"Tell me all she admitted to you."

"After she had been a week with me, she admitted, in answer to my questions, that she had separated from her husband, and that he saw her here, and she feared to meet him, and that some day she would get a divorce from him."

"Did she name the grounds on which she would apply for a divorce?"

"No."

"Why did she not apply at once?"

"She did not have the means."

"Madame, you appear to be a kind-hearted woman."

"Thank you, sir."

"And I believe you are deeply interested in your late lodger."

"I am."

"You believe her to be an innocent and honorable woman?"

"I do. I never saw anything out of the way while she was lodging with me. There appeared to be a great mystery somewhere."

"And did you ever solve that mystery?"

"Never."

"Madame, let me tell you something of this lady as an honorable woman. I will become her friend. She will need a friend—a powerful friend. I can be of great service to her."

"I believe you, sir."

"Then why not confide in me?"

"Let me ask you one question."

"Proceed."

"You are a detective?"

"I am."

"You are seeking this lady?"

"I am."

"Is she accused of any crime?"

"No."

"Then why do you seek her?"

"I am employed by a friend."

"She claims she has no friends."

"But she has a friend."

"I will confide in you, sir."

"And you will do the lady a service."

"What I learned about her I got by installments; and a great deal of what I know, after all, is merely conjecture."

"Tell me all you know."

"It appears true that she did marry this man Dalsinet. Why she married him, and how he managed to fascinate her, I do not know; but I do know that immediately after the marriage she fled from him, and he has pursued her ever since. She appears to be in perfect terror of him; indeed, she told me that should he ever discover her she would kill herself."

"You must not let her know that he has been here."

"I may never have the chance."

"Then you really do not know her present whereabouts?"

"I do not."

"Proceed with your narrative."

"I believe that within a few months she has discovered that she is a great heiress, that in some way she has been robbed of her inheritance. I think she is seeking evidence to establish her rights, and then she will meet this man and fight him through the courts."

The latter was indeed a startling revelation to our hero. He recalled the mysterious interview he had with the veiled woman. Indeed, step by step, link by link, he was surely closing in on the mystery.

"Did she give you any particulars concerning her early life?"

"No."

"And you really believe her to be really a reasonable and sane woman?"

"I do; yes, a very smart woman, and possessed of a great deal of courage for one so young."

"Yes, she is young."

"You have seen her, then?"

"I have."

"She is beautiful?"

"Very beautiful, and that is why I can not understand her marriage to that fellow."

"There is a mystery about that marriage."

"And she never revealed the true facts to you?"

"Never."

"But you have a suspicion?"

"I have."

CHAPTER XXV.

"WHAT is your real suspicion, madame?"

"It is but a suspicion."

"You have grounds for it?"

"Yes."

"Reveal all to me."

"I believe it was a forced marriage. That man is a devil."

"Mrs. Simonet, you have aided me considerably. I may need your aid still further. Can I depend upon you?"

"Yes."

"I will see you again to-morrow. I may have something to reveal in return for what you have told me."

Our hero left the rooms of Mrs. Simonet and proceeded to his own lodgings, and he sent a message to Mr. Baker, and in due time the latter appeared.

"Mr. Baker," said our hero, "suppose it should be discovered that the supposed Miss Ruth Tabor is really a married woman?"

The gentleman turned very pale, and after a moment said:

"That is what I have sometimes dreaded. Have you secured the proofs?"

"No positive proofs; but it is possible that my investigations may lead to such a discovery finally."

The gentleman rose and paced the floor, and indeed he looked like a man who was suffering intense mental anguish, and finally he said:

"Ever since I discovered there had been a male in her room I have feared that she may have been a married woman."

"It is not altogether assured, and I will tell you this much—that, although the present evidence appears to suggest such a possibility, I do not believe she is a married woman."

"What have you discovered?"

"Nothing positive; but I am on the track of important revelations. I am gaining link by link; I can not speak until my chain of evidence is complete. In the meantime I desire to ask you a few questions. Did you ever suspect that any one had a claim upon your estate?"

"I never did until within the last few days."

"And within the last few days?"

"Day before yesterday I received a note—or, rather, an anonymous letter. In this letter the charge was made that I had property in my possession that was not rightfully mine, and I was asked whether or not I was an honorable man and would keep what did not belong to me."

"Did you answer this letter?"

"No—simply because the letter was unsigned and no address was given."

"Is that the first intimation you ever had that you hold property that is not yours?"

"Yes."

"You never had any reason to think you were holding what did not rightfully belong to you?"

"I never did."

"What do you think now?"

"I can not think upon the subject, because I have no data."

"And you have no idea as to the identity of your correspondent?"

"No."

"Could it have been Miss Tabor?"

"I can not tell. The letter certainly was not in her handwriting."

"It may have been a disguised hand."

"No, it was not."

"Suppose it was clearly established that you were wronging some one?"

"I should do what's right if it were proven."

"I am glad to hear you say that, sir."

"Have you any information on the subject?"

"Simply some remote suggestions concerning the possibility that my information relates to you. But how has Miss Tabor acted since I saw her?"

"She went out about an hour after her interview with you."

"She went out?"

"Yes."

"Did she state to you where she was going?"

"No."

"Had she returned up to the hour that you started to come here to meet me?"

"No."

"Mr. Baker, I do not like her going out. Will you meet me here at midnight?"

"I will."

When once again alone our hero muttered:

"The plot deepens. It is mystery upon mystery, but I am going to get at the bottom of this. Let me see Miss Tabor once more and I will force her to speak. I have the weapons now."

At the hour appointed our hero went to the place where he was to meet the man Dalsinet. He found the man awaiting him.

"That will do," remarked Tom, in a low voice, but he did not go and meet the man.

He returned to his lodgings, but in half an hour a female closely veiled walked by the spot where Dalsinet still stood. As she passed the man she looked at him sharply. The man noticed her attentive glance but did not speak. The woman passed on, but in a few moments returned, and she walked close up to Dalsinet, and after passing him suddenly turned and came to a halt confronting him.

"What do you want?" demanded the man, speaking in his broken English.

"I have seen you before."

"Raise your veil, and I can tell whether or not I have ever seen you," came the answer.

"Your name is Dalsinet."

The man gave a start, and then suddenly reaching forward he tore the woman's veil aside. The latter did not seek to restore her veil, but let the man scan her features.

"I never saw you," he said. "I do not recognize you."

"I met you in Paris."

"You met me in Paris?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I can aid you."

"You can aid me?"

"Yes."

"How do you know I need aid?"

"You seek your wife."

The man glared in amazement.

"How is it you know what I seek?"

"I am a fortune-teller."

"Bah! you can not fool me!"

"But how should I know you were seeking your wife if I am not a mind-reader?"

"And you can aid me?"

"Yes, I can."

"You can tell me where I can find her?"

"I can tell you where you can find her."

"Do so."

"Ah! I have a condition."

"You have a condition?"

"Yes."

"You want money?"

"Yes."

"You shall have money when my wife is restored to me?"

"Will you come with me?"

"Where shall we go?"

"To the park. I desire to talk with you."

It was evident that the man Dalsinet was very much perplexed; but without, there was a suspicion running through his mind.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE two proceeded to the park—one of the down-town pleasure-grounds—and they took a seat, when the woman said:

"You offered me money if I restored to you your wife?"

"Yes."

"How much money will you take to leave America forever?"

An oath fell from the man's lips, and he exclaimed:

"Aha! I see now! You never met me in Paris; you come from my wife. Yes, yes, I see it all now!"

The pretended woman laughed, and answered:

"It matters little where I met you. Answer my question."

"You want me to leave America?"

"Yes."

"You admit that you come from my wife?"

"I admit nothing. I merely ask you how much you will agree to receive to leave America."

"I have a price."

"I thought so."

"And I have conditions with my price."

"What are your conditions?"

"I must negotiate directly with my wife."

"What difference does it make so long as you receive your price?"

"It makes a great deal of difference."

"I can not see how."

"Possibly you are not aware that I know all about my wife's fortune."

"You know all about her fortune?"

"I do."

Again the pretended woman laughed, and said:

"Some one has been fooling you."

"Fooling me?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"About your wife's fortune. Your wife has no fortune."

"You can not deceive me. I know all about it."

"You do?"

"I do."

"Prove that you do and I will talk with you."

"I know all about it. I knew about her fortune before she knew about it herself, and it is useless for you to attempt to deceive me."

"Mr. Dalsinet, if you will prove your words I will make a revelation to you."

"If you have a revelation to make, why not make it at once?"

"I am not at liberty to enter into negotiations with you until I am assured exactly concerning your knowledge."

"I will only negotiate personally with my wife."

"You can not negotiate with your wife unless you prove your knowledge."

"I will reveal it to her."

"You must reveal it to me."

"I will not."

"Then you will never see your wife."

"Yes, I will see her."

"Never!"

The man was thoughtful a moment, and then said:

"I am in possession of the will made by Alexander Tabor; I am in possession of all his papers; my wife can not gain her fortune without my aid."

The detective was deeply interested. The last words of the man were a startling revelation indeed.

"You have the will of Alexander Tabor?" said the disguised officer.

"Yes, I have."

"And you refuse to give me any information?"

"I will furnish the information to my wife."

Our hero resorted to every expedient to entrap the man Dalsinet into some sort of a revelation, but the man would not give out one word of actual information. He merely reiterated his declaration that his wife could not gain her property without his aid, and he said further:

"I know my wife has learned to hate me. She never did love me, but she is my wife, all the same. I hold a husband's power. If she will meet me I will negotiate; I may even consent to the annulment of our marriage, but I must deal directly with her."

As stated, the detective resorted to every expedient to draw some sort of statement of facts from the man, but he was, as the saying goes, in one particular direction, as dumb as an oyster, and finally our hero said:

"I must consult with Madame Dalsinet before I can talk further with you."

"Here is one thing you can settle in your

mind," said the man. "I will never open my mouth save to my wife. She need not think she can ever induce me to do so unless we meet and talk face to face. She need not fear me, but she can not much longer evade me. I will find her some day, and each day that she delays meeting me will make a settlement with me the more difficult."

"I will meet you to-morrow," said our hero.

"When and where?"

"Here, and at midnight."

"Why do you set the hour at midnight?"

"I have my own reasons."

"Very well, I will meet you; but meetings with you will do no good."

"At midnight to-morrow we meet."

"All right."

Both men had schemes in their heads.

During the time he had been talking with the man, strange, weird thoughts ran through our hero's mind. He began to get glimpses of strange possibilities, and he muttered once again as he walked away:

"If I can only see Miss Tabor once more I will open up this whole business."

Our hero had gone but a short distance when he discovered that, as upon a former occasion, he was being followed, and it was at that moment that a bold scheme entered his mind, and he muttered:

"Why not now? Yes, by thunder! I will try this scheme anyhow!"

Tom Silver walked toward the river. He knew that the man would follow him, and he determined to take advantage of the situation.

He proceeded down the street until he reached an open space where there was a stone yard. There was a wagon road running through the center of the yard, which was only partly fenced in, and the detective turned in, and, quick as thought, wrought a change. He dropped the disguise of a female as though it were by magic, and in the garb of a man he dodged around, and a few moments later saw the fellow Dalsinet groping around among the squares of flag stones.

Tom suddenly came upon the man and demanded:

"Halloo there! what are you doing here?"

Our hero came upon Dalsinet so suddenly that he was completely dazed.

"What do you want here?" again demanded our hero.

"Nothing," came the answer.

"You want nothing?"

"I want nothing."

"This is a strange place to come to search for nothing. Come, mister, that won't do; give an account of yourself!"

"I got in here by mistake."

"You got in here by mistake?"

"I did."

"That won't do."

Dalsinet got a little irritated at length, and he said:

"What business is it of yours, anyhow?"

The detective drew a flash-lantern, slipped the mask, and throwing the light in the man's face, said:

"I'll show you what business it is of mine."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE man Dalsinet recoiled, and our hero, pressing close to him and studying his face under the flash of his lantern, said:

"I believe you are a thief; I shall arrest you."

"I am not a thief. Who are you?"

"I am an officer; I have been following you."

"You have been following me?"

"Yes. I have seen you in company with a well-known woman in the park."

"A well-known woman?"

"Yes; the smartest thief and decoy-woman in the city. Will you say you were not with her?"

"I was with her."

"Then give an account of yourself."

"That woman robbed me," said Dalsinet.

The man was quick and smart.

"She robbed you?"

"Yes. I had never seen her before. She accosted me, and while talking to me she robbed me. I discovered the robbery and started to follow her. She came into this place—did you see her?"

"I saw her—yes. She has given you the slip, if your story is true; but I do not believe your story. I believe you and that woman are accomplices."

"I never saw her before to-night."

"Can you prove your character?"

"Yes, I can."

"All right. Come with me to the station-house and give an account of yourself."

Dalsinet turned pale. He glanced around in a furtive manner, and after a moment said:

"You can not arrest me."

"I can arrest you, but I do not propose to do so. I merely intend that you shall go to the station and prove your identity."

"I am a gentleman—a stranger in New York."

"That's all right, if you are; but, under the circumstances, you must prove your statement. You were seen in the company of a woman who is under surveillance. A daring robbery was committed not long since. We are on the track of the robbers. We believe that woman is implicated in the robbery—you were seen in her company. If you can prove your identity, all right, otherwise it will be very bad for you. That's all, sir."

"But I am a stranger in New York. I have not been here a month yet."

"It matters not, as far as I am concerned, until you prove your statements."

Dalsinet, as it will be demonstrated later on, was in no position to prove his identity. He did not know a living soul in New York, and after a moment he said:

"This is all very unfortunate."

"Not at all, sir, save that you may be put to some inconvenience. But you have charged that the woman robbed you; that is a charge we are anxious to substantiate and we will recover the stolen property; but you must prove your story and establish your identity."

"I will suffer the loss rather than face the notoriety."

"That will not do."

"Why not?"

"We only have your story that you are a loser. You must prove your identity, as you were seen in close consultation with that woman."

"Hang the woman!"

"She may hang some day, but you must come with me and make things clear."

"I will pay you fifty dollars to drop the matter."

"Ah! Now, Mister Man, I am determined to take you in. Yes, sir; I see that you are a confederate of that woman."

"I am a rich gentleman. I wish to avoid the inconvenience and the publicity."

"Oh, yes; that is the old story. If you prove your identity there will be no publicity, and the momentary inconvenience you must endure."

Dalsinet had been watching his opportunity, and the detective had been watching Dalsinet. The former suddenly shot his fist out, aiming a terrific blow at our hero, but, as stated, the latter was on the watch, and quick as lightning he leaped aside to dodge the blow, and the next moment dealt the man a tap on the head with a club that caused him to drop as though his heart had suddenly ceased to beat.

The man was stunned. He lay still like one dead, and the detective went through his clothes. Our hero knew he was really engaged in an illegal proceeding, but detectives are sometimes compelled to act without search-warrants, and one of these emergencies was presented Tom Silver. Tom was after the solution of a mystery, and in order to bring dark matters to the light he was not disposed to stand upon the order of his tricks, but he went straight ahead. He found a large wallet filled with papers. He looked into it to see that it contained no money. He went all through the man's pockets, and took possession of every note, letter, and scrap of paper he found, and had just concluded his search when he observed the man show signs of recovering, and he hastened away. His little game was over in that direction, and once out of sight he worked transform number three, and again set to lay low. He saw the man rise to his feet, saw him gaze around in a dazed manner, and also saw him feel through his pockets, and overheard his exclamations of anger when he discovered the loss of the wallet containing the papers.

Dalsinet left the stone-yard. He proceeded slowly along the street, and ever and anon he placed his hand upon his head. He was evidently suffering from a slight headache. Tom Silver knew just where to strike, and one blow was always enough when he desired to daze a man temporarily.

Our hero kept upon his track, and he trailed the man to his lodgings—a little house in an obscure street. Indeed, as the detective surmised, it was the cheapest sort of a boarding-house. Having fixed his man, Tom proceeded to his own lodgings, and there found Mr. Baker await-

ing him. That gentleman had a troubled look upon his face.

"You seem worried," said our hero.

"I am worried, sir; indeed I am completely and thoroughly discouraged."

"What is the matter now?"

"I have a startling fact to reveal."

"Let's have it."

"You may not be surprised, but I am deeply grieved, and I am now fully convinced that you have information that you have concealed from me."

"If I have concealed any facts, sir, it is in your interest. But I can tell you one thing; whatever the truth may be, I feel certain that I am trailing this mystery down to the full light."

"You can trust me now."

"How trust you?"

"Tell me all."

"In good time I will."

"The bird has flown."

"The bird has flown?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean, Mr. Baker?"

"Miss Tabor has fled from my house. She had not returned up to midnight."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TOM SILVER gave a start.

"Do you mean to tell me," he ejaculated, "that Miss Tabor has fled from your house?"

"She has fled from my house."

The detective sat a moment lost in deep thought; but at length he said:

"She has been detained; you will find her at your home when you return."

"I am satisfied that it is an escape; she has gone away."

"I will return with you to your home."

"I will be glad to have you do so; but this is what I most dreaded."

The detective and Mr. Baker soon reached the latter's home, and our hero said:

"Go upstairs; I reckon you will learn that Miss Tabor has returned."

Mr. Baker ascended the stairs, followed by our hero, and an examination resulted in the discovery that Miss Tabor had not returned.

Tom turned on the gas, and asked:

"Did you look for a note?"

"No."

Even as Mr. Baker spoke our hero glanced around the room, and his eye fell upon a note stuck between the mirror and the frame. He seized it, and exclaimed:

"This is addressed to you."

"A note?"

"Yes."

Mr. Baker received the note, but did not open it. He stood pale and trembling.

"Why do you not open it, sir?"

"I dare not."

"You dare not?"

"No."

"Nonsense! Read the note."

"This is what I feared. We have driven that beautiful girl to her death!"

"Open the note, sir."

"I dare not."

"Permit me to do so."

"As you like."

The detective quickly tore the note open and read:

"MR. BAKER,—Sir, please do not seek to find me. I shall never return to your house again. I only ask that you will believe a dying woman. I am innocent of any crime. I am unfortunate, but as innocent as one of your children. I go away forever. In haste,

"RUTH TABOR."

The detective read and reread the note, but made no remark. Mr. Baker meantime stood by with a look of wild anxiety upon his face, and at length he exclaimed:

"It is as I thought! She is dead!"

"There is nothing in the note to indicate that she is dead."

"Dare I read it?"

"There is no reason why you should not read it."

With a trembling hand Mr. Baker took the note, and with staring eyes he read it through, and then in a tone of real anguish exclaimed:

"It is as I thought. She is dead!"

"Nonsense!"

"Do you not read? Her declaration comes from a dying woman."

The detective paid but little attention to that remark, but there was one declaration in the

note that caused him great uneasiness, whereat the writer said:

"I am unfortunate, but innocent."

"That exclamation means nothing," said Tom. "It is a common remark; 'I am a dying man; I am a dying woman,' no, no; she does not mean to commit suicide, but I do not like the note."

"She is dead," persisted Mr. Baker.

"I would ask you one question, sir: did Miss Tabor possess a large wardrobe?"

"I do not know. I think not. When she

came to my house she had but a small trunk, and I do not remember that she made any purchases while here, but of course I can not tell."

The detective peeped in a closet and drew forth a small leather trunk.

"Is this her property?"

"Yes."

To the detective's surprise he found the trunk was unlocked, and he said:

"Can I open it, sir?"

"Do you think it best?"

"We must find Miss Tabor."

"Her body, you mean."

"Well, her body; and in order to do so, I must obtain all the information I can."

"Under the circumstances I can not see that there will be any harm in looking into the trunk."

The detective quickly opened the trunk and glanced in. There was no clothing in the trunk, and he was about to close it when his eye fell upon something lying at the bottom of it. He saw that he had secured a photograph, and one glance revealed the fact also that it was a picture of the man Dalsinet. A shadow settled on the detective's face.

"What is it?" demanded Mr. Baker.

"Only a *carte de visite*."

"Let me see it."

Mr. Baker glanced at the face and exclaimed:

"It is the portrait of a man. What a villainous face!"

"Yes, it is the face of a villain undoubtedly."

The two men gazed into each other's eyes, and after a moment Mr. Baker demanded in a husky voice:

"What does it mean?"

"How should I know, sir, what it means?"

"It suggests something to you?"

Our hero remained silent.

"Please tell me what it suggests?"

"It suggests, sir, that it is possible she had an accomplice."

Our hero had not the heart to reveal what the picture really did suggest.

"Then you believe her guilty?"

"I will say, frankly, sir, that the case has now a bad look."

"But the stolen property has been returned."

"Yes."

"How do you account for that?"

"The whole affair is very strange, sir."

"Mr. Silver, that picture suggests something more to you than her guilt."

"Not at present, sir."

"I know better. I was watching your face, and saw a change come over it the moment your eyes fell on that picture."

"That is not strange."

"Why not?"

"I will tell you. I have every reason to believe it to be the photograph of an accomplished villain."

"Then you have seen the original?"

"I think I have."

"And its discovery—the photograph—leads you to think that Miss Tabor is really a bad woman?"

"I will say the finding of this picture in the young lady's trunk is not a pleasant incident."

"I believe her innocent."

"You believe in her innocence?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"You were the first to suggest a possibility of her guilt."

"I know it; and now—"

"Well, what now?"

"She declares her innocence."

"Well?"

"As I live, I believe her words! Yes, I believe she is innocent but unfortunate."

"Unfortunate indeed, I fear, also," was the detective's rejoinder.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TOM SILVER made a careful examination of the room, and after asking many questions reached the conclusion that for many days Ruth

Tabor had been contemplating a secret departure. It was evident to our hero that the fair girl had removed her possessions by piecemeal, as the saying goes, and when his investigations were finally concluded, he said:

"Mr. Baker, you need not fear that Miss Tabor is dead. Possibly it would be better if she were."

"I am satisfied she is dead."

The detective pointed out the fact that suicides had little care for their earthly effects, and he demonstrated that Miss Tabor must have contemplated her departure, and had been planning it for several days.

The detective finally returned to his apartments, and he lay down and took a long sleep, determined to postpone the examination of the papers he had taken from the man Dalsinet until the following day.

Upon the morning succeeding the incidents we have narrated, our hero set to work to examine the papers. He found a number of letters written in both French and Italian, and also a diary. Unfortunately Tom Silver only understood his native language, and the papers were a sealed book to him. He had suspected as much. Hence his delay in their examination, and as he put the papers away he remarked:

"It all depends upon my discovering Ruth Tabor; but in the meantime I reckon I will just take an opportunity to visit Mr. Dalsinet."

As our readers will remember, Tom Silver had followed the man to his lodgings, and he determined upon a bold scheme. He got himself up as a very old man. He prepared a personal card, and then he started forth, and in due time he rang the bell of the little boarding-house into which he had seen the man enter. An ordinary-looking servant-girl answered his summons, and the pretended old man said:

"Good-mornin', my dear."

The girl stared, and exclaimed:

"Well, now! and what do you want?"

"It's a foine mornin'."

"Yes; and that's the reason I've no time to be wastin' wid a beggar loike you!"

"I'm no beggar, me darlin'."

"Ye are not?"

"No."

"And what are ye?"

"I'm a gentleman."

"Ye are?"

"I am."

"And what do ye want?"

"Whisht, now, and I'll tell ye. Shure I've jist come over from Ireland."

"Ye hev?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I've a message to several good girls here; but that's not all. I'm lookin' for a man who is not an Irishman, but who can be of much service to a poor boy who is being wronged by a land-owner."

"Faith, and it's quare talk ye are givin' me. Why should ye be tellin' me all this?"

"I've a reason."

"Ye hev?"

"Yes."

"What's yer reason?"

"I don't want ye to be agin me and the right."

"What hev I to do with you an' the right?"

"Take me down to the kitchen, shure, and I'll tell ye all."

"Luk out for yersel'; do ye think I'm a fool?"

"No, I do not; I think ye are a good, honest girl, and that's why I'm spakin' to ye as I am now."

"You're up to somethin'."

"On my honor I'm not. See here!"

The detective showed the girl a ten-dollar bill.

"And what do ye mane by that?"

"It manes a new dress for ye."

"A new dress for me?"

"Yes, it's yours; if ye aid me ye'll know I'm no beggar, or up to any tricks."

"Well, come down, and I'll see what ye hev to say."

"Remember, I'm a friend jist arrived from Ireland, and have news for ye of yer folk."

The girl led our hero to the kitchen, and the latter told her a very plausible story how two lovers had been kept apart by the villainy of a man who had run away with certain leases and deeds, and when he had gained her confidence he described the man Dalsinet, and asked:

"Is that man living here?"

"He is," came the answer.

"And how long has he lived here?"

"Faith, he's been here about three weeks."

"And what do you think of him?"

"Faith, I see little of him. He is seldom in to his meals, I am told, but he seems quiet and respectable enough."

"Well, Mary," said our hero, "I want to see that man."

"Well, why didn't ye ask to see him?"

"Faith, I thought he might have left some orders about not seein' any one."

"Come to remember, ye are right. I was told to call me mistress if any one asked for Mr. Freeman."

"Is that the name ye know him by here?"

"Yes."

"That's an English name."

"Yes."

"The man is not an Englishman."

"Faith, that's what I thought."

"Now then, do ye mind, Mary, I'm going up to that man's room."

"Ye mustn't do that."

"Why not?"

"Ye will be gettin' me into trouble."

"I'll do nothing of the kind."

"But ye will."

"Wait now until I tell ye me plan; I'll go out now, do ye see, and I'll come here lookin' loike another man, and I'll ring the bell, do ye mind, and ye'll open the door, and I'll say to ye, 'It's all right, I want to see Mr. Freeman,' and I'll go right by ye up to his room, and ye can go and tell yer mistress, and there will be no fault to you, and yer mistress will hev to make the best of it, and I'll see my man all the same."

"Look here, ye can't fool me."

"I've no mind to fool ye."

"But ye hev."

"I hev?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Shure yer not from Ireland at all, ye are one of them detective fellows."

Tom laughed and handed the girl a twenty-dollar bill, and said:

"It's all right, Mary, no harm will come to you."

"I don't know about that."

"Ye can rest aisy."

"Ah, ye needn't put on the brogue, I know ye now well enough."

"Well, now, do ye mind, I'm goin' and I'm comin', and if ye do aught agin me I'll arrest ye."

"Shure I'll not spoil yer schame. Ye can come and go as ye loike, it's no funeral of mine."

CHAPTER XXX.

Tom had worked his game pretty well thus far, and he had a nice scheme he intended to carry through. He went from the house by the basement door, and soon after returned, still disguised as an old man, but he had made a change in his appearance. He rang the bell. Mary, the servant, opened the door, and Tom winked and brushed by her with the remark:

"I wish to see Mr. Freeman. It's all right."

As good luck would have it, the keeper of the boarding-house was in the hall, and overheard what passed, and the visitor appeared to act in such a matter-of-course manner she did not interfere, but merely remarked:

"Mr. Freeman's room is the rear room, third floor."

Tom ascended the stairs and knocked at the door. It was opened by the man Dalsinet, and Tom pushed into the room.

"Who are you, and what do you want?"

"It's all right," said our hero.

The man Dalsinet glared in amazement.

"Yes, Mr. Freeman, I have some business with you."

"I do not know you, sir."

"It's all right; you will understand when I explain my business."

"This is all very strange," said Dalsinet.

"It may appear so, but it's all right."

Tom had walked straight into the room. He had pushed Dalsinet gently back while talking to him, and closed the door. His movements were so assured and confident that for the time being Dalsinet was dazed.

"Sit down, sir," said Tom.

The man addressed mechanically obeyed.

"I have come to talk to you about your wife, Mr. Dalsinet," said our hero.

If the visitor had said, "I have come to kill you," Dalsinet could not have been more surprised. Indeed, his surprise was so great that for an instant he could not make answer. But at length he managed to ask:

"Who the devil are you?"

"It's all right; I will explain later on. But in the meantime I want you to answer me a few questions."

"I'll answer no questions until I am satisfied as to your identity."

"That's all right, and I'm all right. Under what circumstances did you marry your wife?"

"Who are you?"

"My name is Brown. Does that help you?"

"No; and what interest have you in my affairs, Mr. Brown?"

"I am a lawyer."

"A lawyer?"

"Yes."

"Who sent you here?"

"It does not matter; I am here."

"You may think you are talking to a fool."

"May be I am. I do not know yet. We have not talked long enough. But you had better keep your seat."

"You came here to ask me some questions?"

"Yes."

"And you are a lawyer?"

"Yes."

"Well, I propose to ask you a few questions; and I also propose to let you understand that if you do not answer my questions I will kick you out of my room and down the stairs to the street."

"If you should attempt that I should at once decide that you are a fool! Remember, I am a lawyer; I do not fear being kicked down-stairs. I am here on business, and after I have finished my business I will go without being kicked out."

"Will you tell me who has employed you?"

"No one has employed me; I have employed myself."

"You have employed yourself?"

"Yes."

"That is a strange statement."

"It is true."

"How is it you happen to know anything about my case?"

"I'll tell you: I have a client named Simonet—a lady who sometimes lets out apartments. She had a lady boarder. Her boarder skipped, and the day she skipped you came along and claimed that her late boarder was your wife. Mrs. Simonet came to consult me. The good woman was very much frightened by your violent behavior. When I heard her story I made up my mind that there was a case I am looking for. I got all the information I could out of her, and then I set to discover the whereabouts of her late boarder. And then I set to find out all about Mr. Dalsinet. I had your description, and I found that a man had had a talk with you. I found this man. From him I learned that for reasons of his own he had followed you to your boarding-house. I secured your address. I came here and I heard that you were living here under the name of Freeman. I wanted to have a talk with you, and here I am."

Dalsinet listened to this cheery narrative with extended eyes, and when it was concluded he asked:

"Were you as successful in tracing down my wife?"

"I generally succeed when I start out."

"And you saw my wife?"

"Well, yes, I've seen her."

"And she has employed you?"

"No; she has another lawyer. She would not have anything to do with me, so I came to you."

"I have my own lawyer."

"And you do not need my services?"

"No."

"That is what I anticipated. So I have determined to work in on this case on my own account. I will compel you both to pay me a fee before I get through."

"You can consider yourself through with me now."

"Ah, thank you; but you have not employed me."

"No."

"Then how in thunder can you discharge me?"

Dalsinet stared, and said:

"You have great impudence!"

"Yes, sir, I have; that's how I live. My impudence is my stock in trade. Why, I've been following you around for two or three days, and I can give your wife information that will enable her to get a divorce from you in less than thirty days, and how will you stand then?"

"You are not only an impertinent rascal, but you are a fool!"

"Am I?"

"Yes."
 "So were you."
 "I?"
 "Yes."
 "How?"
 "Last night."
 "What do you mean?"
 "You had a talk with a woman."
 "Yes."
 "That woman was sent to you by me. She is my witness. She will confess to anything I demand—do you see? Am I a fool? I tell you that the time will come when you will be sorry, very sorry, that you did not employ me. How much of a fool do you think me now?"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THERE was an odd expression upon the detective's face. He had entered that man's presence without any well-devised scheme in his head, and had run on as circumstances and the passing developments suggested.

"You are a cunningascal," at length said Dalsinet.

"I am, and I will spoil all your plans, you see. Your wife would not employ me, and you refuse to do so."

"Suppose I do employ you?"

"I do not know as I will enter your employment now."

"Why not?"

"I do not believe you would tell me the truth if you were to tell me anything."

"I may state my case to you—at least, a part of it."

"If you do so I will promise to advise you, and you may rest assured that I will advise you well."

Dalsinet thought a moment, and it ran through his mind that he did need advice; and what is more, he had faith in the detective's statements. He made up his mind that his visitor was a villainous lawyer "on the make." He determined to at least confide to a certain extent in the lawyer, and he said:

"I will tell you a part of my story."

"As you please."

"It does not matter—the details of my marriage; it is enough to say that my wife is an heiress."

"What are the circumstances?"

"Oh, it matters not what the circumstances are. She is an heiress, and since her marriage I reckon she learned the facts herself, and she ran away from me."

"That is all you have to tell?"

"At present—yes."

"I see you do not need any advice."

"No."

During his long talk with Dalsinet the detective had been glancing around the room. He saw a trunk in the room and several other articles of luggage, and a scheme entered his mind. But before carrying out his scheme he determined to make a scene, and he asked:

"What countryman are you, Mr. Dalsinet?"

"I am a Frenchman."

"A Frenchman?"

"Yes."

"Are you acquainted with American laws?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Simply because in this country your marriage was illegal unless—"

The detective stopped.

"Unless what?"

"You told your wife the truth, and she married you with a full knowledge of all the facts."

"What facts?"

"Oh, you know."

The man's face became livid.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean."

"I certainly do not."

"Oh, yes, you do."

"I demand that you explain your meaning."

"If your wife did not know the real facts, she was justified in escaping from you."

"Will you tell me to what facts you allude?"

"I conclude, Mr. Dalsinet, that your wife was deceived."

There came a fierce light in Dalsinet's eyes, and his face assumed a deathly hue.

"Will you explain?" he said, in a husky voice.

"Mr. Dalsinet, you contemplate violence. I can read it in your eyes. Do not attempt it with me."

"Will you explain your meaning?"

"I will if you insist."

"I insist."

Our hero whispered a few words in the man's

ear, and for a moment it appeared as though Dalsinet were about to faint, but he sat immovable for a few moments, and a deathly stillness pervaded the room; but at length the man said:

"You lie!"

The words had hardly escaped his lips when our hero suddenly leaped to his feet, and quick as thought he clapped a handkerchief to Dalsinet's mouth and nose. The man's head fell forward, and quick as lightning Tom drew a gag from his pocket. He had come prepared for emergencies. The gag he fastened in his victim's mouth; he quickly bound the man hand and foot and then tossed him upon the bed. As the effects of the drug began to wear off, the man stared but lay helpless. He could neither speak nor move.

Tom stood over his victim, a look of triumph upon his face. It was a mean and unlawful game he had played; but it was a game of diamond cut diamond for the nonce. Our hero knew he was dealing with a villain, and he knew it was useless to adopt any but the most extreme measures.

Only a moment did Tom waste. He went to the trunk standing in the room. He found it locked, but the key he soon secured from the man's pocket. The trunk was opened, and Tom went through it, and during the whole operation his victim lay and watched the proceedings, a look of agony on his face. But he was helpless to move or interfere.

Tom dragged everything in the way of clothing from the trunk, and he uttered words of disappointment at not finding that something which it appeared he was searching for. He was an old searcher, however, and in time he opened the secret false bottom in the trunk, and as he did so he turned and looked toward his victim. The latter's face was convulsed with agony.

"I've got 'em," said Tom, speaking to his victim.

The latter could not make answer.

Tom drew from the false bottom in the trunk a number of papers. These he transferred to his pockets, and he continued his search, taking nothing of value save in the form of manuscripts. At length his search was completed. He did not stop to examine any of the papers; he merely secured possession of them, and then he returned every article to the trunk, shut down the lid, and locked it. Having carried out his scheme thus far, he approached his victim. He stooped down and whispered in his ear:

"The game is mine, Mister Man!"

Having spoken the words recorded, Tom again chloroformed his victim, undid the binding, removed the gag from the man's mouth, and stole from the room, leaving his victim insensible.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SOME time later the man Dalsinet returned to full consciousness. At first he was a little dazed, but later on, as stated, fully recovered and rose from the bed, and a madder man never was seen. A volley of bitter oaths fell from his lips. The fellow fully realized his great loss, and he sat a long time lost in deep thought.

Dalsinet was a shrewd, self-centered man, and during his adventurous career had been uniformly successful. He was a bold man, and at different times had taken long chances, but at length he appeared to have run foul of a mysterious individual who could give him points all the time. He ran over in his mind the several incidents that had attended his efforts to find his wife, and he was a bitterly disappointed man indeed. He was prepared to do murder, and, as infuriated, bitter curses fell from his lips as the realization became fixed in his mind that he had lost the one great weapon he had intended to use.

Meantime Tom Silver returned to his lodgings, a delighted man. He did not at the time know just what a treasure he had found; but he felt assured, from the expressions that he had seen upon the man's face while he was going through the trunk, that he was on an important trail.

Our hero reached his lodgings, removed his disguise, locked his door, and sat down to look over the bundle of papers he had secured. For six full hours he was engaged in the work, and during that time many exclamations of surprise and delight had fallen from his lips.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when our hero sent word for Mr. Baker to come to his house. That gentleman answered the summons at once, and upon his arrival our hero asked:

"Well, has Miss Tabor returned?"

"No."

There was a strange look upon our hero's face.

"You have heard some important news," said Mr. Baker.

"No, I have not learned anything concerning the fate of Miss Tabor; but I am still of the opinion that she is alive and well, and that some day we will find her."

"Some day," repeated Mr. Baker.

"Well, probably within a few days, and in the meantime I wish to talk with you upon another subject. When your father died did he make a will?"

"He did not."

"You were the heir at law?"

"I was."

"And there was no one to dispute your inheritance?"

"No one."

"How large is the estate that came into your possession?"

"When I became possessed of the estate it was worth about two millions. It has doubled in value."

"That is very fortunate," said our hero.

"Yes, very fortunate. But why do you ask me these questions?"

"I have a strange story to tell you."

"Is my title to the estate questioned?"

"It may be."

"I tell you now I will not withhold a single dollar from any one who can prove a right to any part of it."

"You are an honorable man, and you need have no fear. You will not become a beggar even though there may arise a claim against you."

"Will you explain?"

"Yes, I will. Your father was a lawyer?"

"Yes."

"Your father had a client whose name I will call Barker."

"Proceed."

"This man Barker was a very peculiar character. He entered your father's office one day and deposited with him a quarter of a million of dollars. He took no receipt for it, and left very singular directions. He told your father he was going on a strange expedition and he might never return; and he said: 'I give this money to you in trust. If I return you will return it to me; if I do not return I will send you directions what to do with it. If you do not hear from me in five years the money is yours absolutely.'"

"What a strange incident!" remarked Mr. Baker.

"Ah! but the strangest part of the incident is yet to be told."

"Can you authenticate all you are telling me—have you the proofs?"

"Yes; at the proper time I will furnish all the necessary proofs."

"Ah! I think I can see what is to come. There has arisen an heir?"

"Well, yes; there may arise a claim for that money. But let me proceed with my narrative."

"One question: Is Miss Tabor the sole heiress?"

"That is a question I can not answer at present. But let me finish my narrative."

"Proceed; but let me repeat, justice shall be done upon full proof of the justness of any claim. But you will yourself see that it does appear that the claim, if made, is to be founded on a most strange and incredible incident."

"Yes, I admit that; but let me proceed. Your father had a clerk named Bentley?"

"Yes, I remember him well. He disappeared very mysteriously, and my father was never able to learn what became of the man. He left my father's office one day—yes, I remember it was midday—and he was never seen afterward."

"Could you prove this man's handwriting?"

"Certainly I could. I have seen thousands of pages of manuscript copied by him, and I have letters written by him to an old client at my house now."

"And you would know his signature?"

"I would."

"Beyond question?"

"Yes."

"This is all very fortunate, and now let me proceed. This man Bentley was an honest man?"

"My father never doubted his honesty."

"How about his disappearance?"

"It was learned that his accounts were all right after his absence."

"And no dishonesty was ever proved against him?"

"Never; and my father always believed the good man was murdered."
 "He was not murdered."
 "He has turned up after all these years?"
 "He is dead now, I believe, but before dying he made a confession."
 "A confession?"
 "Yes."

"Then he was a dishonest man?"
 "No; he was tempted and fell, but ere he reaped the benefit of his crime he repented, and later on sought to make restitution."
 "This is indeed a strange narrative you are relating to me."

"The strangest part of the narrative, as I said, is yet to come. It so happened that when Mr. Barker was talking to your father in his private office, that Bentley overheard every word that passed. He heard all about the strange compact, but never let your father know that he knew whence had come the quarter of a million in money that was placed to the credit of your father in the bank that day."

"What were the relations between this man Barker and my father?"

"Only those of old friendship that had existed from early boyhood, and the relations of counsel and client."

"And this money was really placed in my father's care?"

"Yes."

"And was it never claimed?"

"Ah, there comes the strange part of the narrative and the explanation of the mystery attending the disappearance of Bentley. Nearly five years had expired when a mysterious package came to your father's office. Your good father at the time was absent from the city, and his clerk Bentley was under instructions to open all letters."

"One moment," suddenly interrupted Mr. Barker. "Will the conclusion of this narrative involve my father's honor?"

"No."

"Thank Heaven! Proceed."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"Your father's name will not be dishonored by any disclosures that I have to make," resumed the detective.

"I am glad of that. I did fear his name might be assailed, and in that case I would fight any claim to the bitter end."

"As I said," continued the detective, proceeding with his narrative, "your father's clerk had authority to open all letters, and among the letters he received the day named was one from Mr. Barker, and in this letter Mr. Barker gave instructions concerning the disposal of the quarter of a million of dollars that had lain for nearly five years in the custody of your father. Indeed, he sent on his will, so that in case your father had died his executors would know how to dispose of the money, as he sent your father's receipt and authenticated statement as to the validity of the claim."

"I think I begin to see what is to come!" exclaimed Mr. Barker.

"What do you see?"

"I can perceive that there was presented a most excellent opportunity for the perpetration of a fraud."

"The letter of Mr. Barker was written on his death-bed. Indeed, he calculated he would be dead ere the letter reached your father, and he did die. In fact, he was dead at the moment that Bentley received the papers, and, as you say, a good opportunity was offered for the perpetration of a crime."

"And Mr. Bentley yielded to the temptation?"

"He did. I need not go into particulars. He suppressed Mr. Barker's letter to your father and all the other papers. He held the receipts and the other documents provided by your father to establish the claim in case of his death."

"I can see it all."

"No, the strangest part is yet to come. Bentley took measures to ascertain that Mr. Barker was really dead. He had on the papers the proper data for the making of inquiries, and he learned, as I stated, that the gentleman had died before the receipt by Bentley of papers on behalf of your father."

"One word. Is Miss Tabor the heiress?"

"I can not tell you; but there is an heiress, and she is to be discovered. Remember, the gentleman's name was Barker, and the money was left to an heir of the same name, and as yet the real identity of the rightful owner of the money has not been discovered."

"How did you learn all these facts?"

"In a most remarkable manner."

"Have you the papers of which you speak?"

"Some of them."

"Enough of them to establish the claim?"

"I think I have enough to establish the claim; but let me proceed. Within a month after he had suppressed the papers Mr. Bentley was stricken with remorse, but he did not have the courage to confess his sin, and after awhile he determined to run away."

"What was his scheme?"

"It was his scheme originally to personate Mr. Barker. He possessed the receipts, and he could have presented them to your father and have ordered the money sent to him or paid in any way he might direct; and as your father knew how eccentric a man Mr. Barker was, he would not have been surprised at any sort of odd disposition of the money."

"Bentley calculated all this?"

"Yes."

"What became of him?"

"He started out to discover the real heirs."

"And did he find them?"

"No; he was taken sick, and for a year he lay in an hospital. When he was discharged two years had already elapsed. He went to the place where the heir should have been found, but could find no trace of her."

"There was but one heir?"

"Yes."

"And it was a female?"

"Yes."

"I can see it all. Miss Tabor is the real heiress. Oh, that I had known it!"

"On my honor, I have no reason to suspect that Miss Tabor is the heiress."

"Are you speaking frankly?"

"I am."

"And she is not the heiress?"

"I have not the least suspicion that she is the heiress," came the answer.

"Can you find the real heiress?"

"I hope to do so; but let me complete my narrative: Mr. Bentley never recovered his health, but he set out on a pilgrimage to find the rightful owner of the property. Meantime your father died."

"And he was never again tempted to secure the money for himself?"

"No; but after many years he got upon the track of the real heiress, and he set to work to prove her identity. He succeeded, and—"

"Well, proceed."

"Alas! just at this time my narrative ceases. I have yet to complete, link by link, the chain of evidence."

"Of one thing you can rest assured: when the proofs are given me that I hold property belonging to another I will return it when the rightful owner presents himself or herself."

"I am very glad to hear you say so, and now I will devote my time to discoveries that will complete the narrative."

"And you think you will succeed?"

"I do."

"And how about Miss Tabor?"

"I shall find her."

"I will confess one thing—I did hope that your narrative would result in establishing her claim as the heiress."

"And then you could keep the money in the family, eh?" exclaimed our hero, with a laugh.

"No; I never hope to make Miss Tabor my wife. I have banished all thoughts of that character from my heart; but I do hope to find her, and know that her innocence has been established."

"I will make one admission. Her disappearance has a bad look."

"But she has declared her innocence."

"It is not to be expected that she would proclaim her guilt. But I must find her."

"Do not relax your efforts or spare expense; and I also desire that you gather the facts to complete the strange narrative concerning the quarter of a million."

"I will do my best; but let me say one thing, Mr. Barker. It is just possible that Miss Tabor is innocent."

"Of the robbery—yes; but she is a married woman."

"Suppose she is a widow?"

"Ah! I see you think she is a married woman."

"I will admit it looks that way now."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TOM SILVER made up his mind that he had but one course to pursue. He must find Ruth

Tabor. He had made wonderful discoveries, and had fallen upon very exciting past history, but as yet he had not made one step toward the actual solution of the mystery of the robbery.

Upon the day following the incidents we have described, our hero started forth bright and early. He had made up his mind to "get upon the track of Mrs. Simonet, as he still indulged the suspicion that the lady named really did know of the new residence of her late boarder. Tom got to the house, and lay upon the watch, but the lady did not appear, and finally he crossed to the entrance and ascended to her rooms, and speedily made the discovery that the bird had flown.

"It is as I suspected," he said. "Well, all right, I will just start in on a close watch—that's all; I'll keep moving."

Later on in the day our hero received a visit from Mr. Barker, and that gentleman said:

"I've been doing a little detective business on my own account."

"Well, how have you succeeded?"

"You remember I told you I had received an anonymous letter?"

"Yes."

"I received a second one, and without going into details I have received an invitation to meet an old lady at a certain house to-day."

"You are to meet an old lady?"

"Yes; she is to make a revelation to me."

"Good; go and meet her."

"It struck me that it would be a good idea for you to go in my place."

"What are the circumstances?"

"I inserted an advertisement, and within a day received a letter giving me an address, and I answered the letter, and later received the note making this appointment. I am to go to a house on the west side of town—here is the address—and I am to inquire for Mrs. Benton. I am to send up a card bearing my own name, and then I am to receive some important and definite information."

"And what do you propose?"

"I propose that you go and personate me."

The detective thought the matter over a moment and said:

"It may be better for you to keep your own appointment."

"I will be frank: I am afraid to go."

"Afraid?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It may be a scheme of robbery."

"You are right; I will go. At what hour were you to make the call?"

"Between eight and nine o'clock to-night."

"I will take the chances in your place."

At the hour named our hero proceeded according to the address he had received, and found himself in front of a plain little two-story house in an old but respectable quarter of the city. He studied all the surroundings and then rang the bell. A colored woman answered the summons, and our hero said:

"I have called to see Mrs. Benton."

"Have you a card?"

The detective passed over one of Mr. Barker's cards.

"Wait," said the servant, and she disappeared in the rear parlor, but returned in a few moments, and said:

"You can come in, Mr. Barker; Mrs. Benton will see you."

The detective was shown into the rear room, and as he crossed the threshold his eyes fell upon a pleasant looking old lady; but at the first glance a suspicion ran through our hero's mind. At the same instant the old lady uttered an exclamation of amazement, and said:

"You are not Mr. Barker."

"I represent Mr. Barker," said our hero.

"I do not desire to see his representative; I must talk with Mr. Barker. You can go away; I must see Mr. Barker."

"Madame, you can just as well talk with me."

"You can go away; I will not talk with you. This is a trick!"

"A trick, madame?"

"Yes, a trick!"

"Possibly it is a trick, madame; but is it not more likely that you are the trickster? I am not here at my own desire; if Mr. Barker had come here he would not have come at his own suggestion."

"He was afraid to come?"

"He sent me."

"But I must deal with him."

"What guarantee has he that you are not a party to a conspiracy?"

"Why should I seek to conspire against him?"
 "Ah! that is a question that remains to be answered. One thing is certain: you wrote first to Mr. Baker; you make a strange proposition to him; your proposition is a question of money; you ask a secret interview, and you decline to see any one but the party whom you addressed, and that gentleman is a millionaire whom you ask to come to a secret interview."

The old lady was silent a moment, but at length said:

"I must speak with Mr. Baker in person; the circumstances are very peculiar."

"Yes, the circumstances are very peculiar, and I will tell you frankly the whole affair suggests robbery."

"Ah, you do not know of what you are talking."

"Oh, I do, madame; you spoke of a trick. Now do you suppose Mr. Baker would come to meet a secret correspondent?"

"He sent you?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"His friend."

"Good! I will tell you as his friend that there is no harm intended. I have a strange and wonderful story to relate to Mr. Baker. He will understand the narrative; you would not understand, and it would be useless for me to talk to you."

"You must talk to me."

"I must?"

"You must."

"Stranger, you had better go away."

"I shall not go away until you have made a proper explanation of your purpose and motive."

"I shall tell you nothing. I will speak alone to Mr. Baker. If he does not come here, the day will come when he will be sorry—that is all."

"You threaten?"

"I only predict. You had better open up your budget."

"I will say no more to you."

"Oh, yes, you will."

"Not one word!"

"You will confess the whole story to me."

The old lady gave a start.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed.

"Why do you say I will confess?"

"Yes, you will confess. I can tell you a part of your story, but there are some parts of the narrative that are very incomplete. I am glad you sent for Mr. Baker, because now you can reveal the whole mystery."

The old lady sat and stared.

"Come, madame, proceed now and talk to me just as though I were Mr. Baker himself."

"I will not speak one word. I beg of you go away; do not intimidate a helpless old lady."

The detective merely laughed, and said:

"I am not seeking to intimidate you, but I do insist that you confess."

"Confess!"

"Yes."

"What shall I confess?"

"In the first place, your name is not Benton."

"It is the name I gave."

"It is not your name, and now listen: you spoke of tricks—well, there is a trick contemplated. You listen to me; you are not a woman at all—you are a man."

The old lady, or rather the pretended old lady, fell back as though she were about to faint.

"Come," said our hero, "now tell me your story just as you were about to repeat it to Mr. Baker. Yes, Mr. Bentley, confess."

CHAPTER XXXV.

As the detective uttered the words, "Yes, Mr. Bentley, confess," the pretended old lady literally uttered a groan; her eyes started, and a look of terror overspread her face. The detective watched the disguised man's exhibition of agitation with a quiet smile upon his face; but finally a fear rose in his mind, and he said: "You need not fear, Mr. Bentley; no harm will come to you. Indeed, your story is already known to me."

"Who are you?"

"I am an officer, but you need not fear. As I said, your story is known; but no harm will come to you—no punishment."

"My story is known?" repeated the exposed man, in a husky voice.

"Yes, your story is known."

"What story?"

"You were once the clerk of Mr. Baker's father; you suppressed the papers sent on to Mr. Baker from Mr. Barker. You repented almost

immediately, and since you have been a suffering man. You never benefited from your yielding to momentary temptation."

"How did you learn all those facts?"

"Your diary fell into my possession."

"Then Madame Dalsinet has recovered her rights?"

"No; but it now lies in your power to aid her to recover her rights."

A moment old Bentley remained lost in deep thought; but at length he muttered:

"What a crooked way one false step entaileth!"

"You are right."

"I made a false step."

"You did."

"I will swear I never profited one penny through my wickedness!"

"I believe that."

"But I have suffered intensely."

"I believe that."

"My whole life has been shadowed."

"I believe that also, old man; but now you can make restitution."

"I can make restitution?"

"You can."

"How?"

"By telling me all the facts."

"If you have my diary you have all the facts. How did my diary come into your possession?"

"I will tell you: I recovered it from the man Dalsinet. How did it ever come into his possession?"

"You do not know?"

"I do not."

Again the old man Bentley thought a moment, and then said:

"I will tell you."

"Yes, tell me."

"You know from my diary I started out to discover the heiress. I traversed this land from one end to the other. Years passed, and I gave it up, until one day I saw the passenger list of an outgoing steamer, and among the names I saw the name of the lady I had been seeking. Yes, fourteen years had passed, but at last I got a clew. I started at once to go to Europe. On the passage out I made the acquaintance of a man who was very kind to me."

"Who was this man?"

"Dalsinet. And when I reached London I was taken sick. I thought I was about to die. The man Dalsinet had been kind to me on the voyage. He still remained with me and nursed me like a brother. I believed he must be the soul of honor. I thought my time had come. He claimed to be a clergyman, and not expecting to live three days, I told all to him, and confided the papers to his care. The day following my confidence he deserted me, and strangely enough, from that moment I commenced to improve, and I finally recovered. But I had lain upon my back for several months. The moment I recovered I went direct to Paris."

"You had means of your own?"

"Yes; during the fourteen years I had accumulated quite a sum of money."

"That man did not rob you?"

"Yes, he did rob me of all my ready money, but I secured more. And as I said, I went on to Paris, and in due time I found the family with whom Ruth Tabor had lived as governess. From them I learned that the girl had most mysteriously disappeared. I asked them if they had made any efforts to find her. They answered no, as they supposed she had gone off deliberately."

"I asked if they knew she was an heiress? They answered, 'No.' I asked then if she did not confide in them. The answer came 'No.'"

"Did you ask," interrupted the detective, "about the man Dalsinet?"

"Yes; and they told me that a man who answered Dalsinet's description had been paying her marked attention, and I gathered from them that they suspected her elopement with this man. I had made up my own mind that Dalsinet was a cheat and a fraud, and I determined to hunt up the girl. I secured one of the most skillful detectives in Paris, and he commenced his search. He was a wonderful man, and without going into the full details of his efforts, I will merely say that he unearthed the scoundrel who had deceived the fair girl. He obtained certain facts, and from them deduced his conclusions as follows: He suggested that the man Dalsinet had in some way got the girl's confidence; that he had inveigled her into a secret meeting, and had forced her to marry him, and that immediately after the marriage the girl fled: indeed, within an hour succeed-

ing the marriage. This latter fact he ascertained definitely."

It was our hero's turn to do a little thinking, and he, too, began to draw conclusions.

Old Bentley related several other facts which will be unfolded to our readers later on. At length the detective asked:

"Have you ever seen Mrs. Dalsinet?"

"No."

"But you found Mr. Baker?"

"Yes."

"Why did you seek him?"

"I desired to make a full confession to him, hoping that he would take steps to discover the heiress."

"But you intimated that she lived under his care."

"I meant she might be somewhere in New York."

"That is all you know?"

"Yes."

"You have never seen the heiress?"

"No."

The detective held a long consultation with old Bentley, and at the same time decided upon his course of action.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TOM SILVER had worked the case up well, and as he thought once more over all the facts, he reasoned out a most satisfactory and remarkable conclusion, and, as our readers will learn in the end, his discernment was certainly unerring and his conclusions singularly accurate; indeed, throughout the whole investigation his conclusions had been accurate, and this fact had signally aided him in his trail.

Our hero returned to his own lodgings, and sitting down, went into a study. He was still engaged in deep thought when Mr. Baker entered his presence.

"I was so anxious," said the gentleman, "that I have come to hear your report."

The detective smiled, and said:

"I have a very startling report to make."

"You saw the old woman?"

"Yes."

"And what came of the interview?"

"I would prefer not to make any revelations at present."

"You must not keep me in suspense."

"Suspense?"

"Yes."

"I thought you had dismissed all hope from your mind."

"I have, but—"

"Well?"

"Suppose it should turn out in the end that—"

"Proceed."

"I love Ruth Tabor, and—"

Again Mr. Baker stopped, and again the detective said:

"Proceed."

"I believe she loves me."

"You never admitted this much before."

"I admit it now."

"Give me three days, Mr. Baker, and I will have a startling revelation to make."

"Why not give me an intimation now?"

"My story is incomplete. When I have completed the chain of evidence I will speak. I am proceeding to do so link by link. I trust in a few days to have the last link forged, and then I will tell you all."

"Can I indulge any hope?"

"Hope?"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

"That Ruth Tabor will be vindicated."

The detective smiled, and said:

"Yes, you can indulge the hope that she will be vindicated."

"Fully?"

"Yes, fully."

"Thanks! I shall be an anxious man for three days."

Tom Silver that evening started out. He was a shrewd man, and he was on the lookout for a clew to his last link. He walked the city round and round. He haunted the neighborhood of the house where the Simonet woman had lived, and he was still in the vicinity when he saw the man Johnson issue forth. Our hero followed the man, and when an opportunity offered, accosted him.

"Halloo, Johnson!"

"Halloo!" answered the man, as he turned and faced our hero.

"It's all right, old man!"

"Ah! it's you?"

"Yes."

The bank-robber had recognized our hero. "The other bird has flown?" said Tom. "Yes." "Can you aid me?" "How aid you?" "I want to get on her track." "I'll tell you something: Mrs. Simonet, after all, was only a lessee of that place; she did not own the furniture." "She did not, eh?" "No." "The furniture has been removed from those rooms?" "Yes." "Who removed the articles?" "The real owner." "How do you know?" "The lady's agent was free to tell my wife and the other occupants." "Free to tell?" "Yes." "Where was the furniture removed to, do you know?" "A strange house." "Do you know where?" "Yes."

Johnson gave the address to our hero, and Tom proceeded to the place. It was a large furniture store, and the adjoining building was used as a public store-house. The signs were all over the building. Tom glanced around, and good luck favored him. He saw a lady come from the office of the store. One glance was sufficient. He recognized the woman and started upon her trail. He followed her until she entered a lodging house on a side street, in a very poor neighborhood. He stood opposite the house when he saw a light suddenly appear in one of the upper rooms, and he made up his mind that the room was the one occupied by Mrs. Simonet. He had tracked the woman to her hiding-place.

The detective lay on the lookout for an hour, and then made up his mind to gain admission to that house and her room. He saw a man enter the house. He entered without a night-key, as the door appeared to be open.

"I'll risk it," said our hero. He crossed the street and tried the door. It was about nine o'clock in the evening. He ascended the stairs. He had the bearings to guide himself to the room where he had seen the lights appear. He ascended to the room and boldly knocked at the door, and the demand came:

"Who is there?" The detective did not answer, but opened the door, and the next instant he and Mrs. Simonet stood face to face. The woman turned pale, and the detective said: "Good-evening, madame. I am much obliged to you for sending for me."

The woman evidently recognized our hero at a glance.

"I did not send for you," she said. "Well, I am here." "I am not sorry, sir."

"If you are not sorry, why did you steal away?"

"I was not stealing away from you." "I am glad to hear that; but if you were not stealing away from me, why did you not leave your address?"

"I was fleeing from that man."

"Which man?"

"Dalsinet."

"Why should you flee from him?"

"I feared him. He had threatened me."

"But I had promised to protect you."

"I feared that man."

"Well, madame, you say you were not fleeing from me?"

"No."

"You do not fear me?"

"No."

"Then you are not sorry I have found you out?"

"No."

"Good; you can assist me."

"I can not see how I can."

"I wish to find your late boarder."

"I can not aid you."

"Madame, you can put me in the way of finding her."

"I can not."

"You are in full sympathy with her?"

"I am."

"You would like to see her put in possession of her fortune?"

The woman stared.

"It is true, madame: Mrs. Dalsinet is an actress."

"I am glad to hear it, sir." "I can put her in possession of her fortune." "I am glad to hear it." "But you must aid me to find her." "I would if it were in my power." "You may meet her."

"It is possible."

"When you do meet her tell her that the detective, Mr. Silver, is desirous of seeing her, and you can tell her that the gentleman has good news for her."

"If I should ever see her I will tell her what you say."

"And you will not attempt to hide from me again?"

"I shall remain here unless you reveal my residence to that man Dalsinet. If he discovers my abode I shall flee away, and neither he nor you will ever find me again."

"Madame, I am more anxious than yourself that he shall not find you; and now remember I have great news for Mrs. Dalsinet."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE detective was playing a shrewd game. He understood women's traits pretty well, and he was laying a little fact before the Simonet woman.

"Will you tell me what news you have for her?"

"I will on condition that you will aid me to find her."

"I will."

"I can tell her the whole story of her fortune. I can arrange it so that she will come into possession of it."

"But her husband?"

"Well, what of him?"

"She fears him. She would rather lose her fortune than meet him."

"I do not believe the man is her husband."

"She says he is not, but then she can not prove it, and the man has a certain power over her."

"If I can see her for about ten minutes I will manage to convince her that she has nothing to fear from this man. You can tell her all about that, and what I assert is true."

The detective departed from the room and descended to the street, but he did not go far. He lay on the lookout, and two hours later his nice little game seemingly appeared to work as he had expected. He saw the lights extinguished in Mrs. Simonet's rooms, and he muttered:

"Now I have it."

A few moments later and the woman appeared upon the street. She looked around furtively and then started off, and the detective set to "shadow" her. She walked quite rapidly, and he followed her until he saw her stop in front of a house down near the river. Tom laughed, and muttered:

"I've got her now."

He saw the Simonet woman knock at the door, and he stole close up to overhear what passed when the door should be opened. He heard the woman ask:

"Is Mrs. Dean at home?"

"No," came the answer.

"Where is she?"

"She went out just at dark."

"And she has not returned?"

"No."

"I will call again in the morning," said Mrs. Simonet, and she turned away and the door was closed.

She started to return to her own lodgings. She had gone but a short distance when Tom stole up and laid his hand on her shoulder. The woman turned, and upon recognizing our hero uttered a cry.

"You here?" she ejaculated.

"Yes, I am here."

"I see it all."

"Indeed!"

"You have been shadowing me."

"I have; and now, madame, I know that you have been deceiving me."

"How have I deceived you?"

"You knew all the time when Mrs. Dalsinet could be found."

"No; since I saw you I received a note."

"We will let that pass. You know now."

"I do not."

"She lives in that house where you just called."

"She calls that her home now, I admit, but—"

The man stopped.

"Proceed."

"I am in great distress."

"Why?" "I fear evil." "You do?" "Yes." "What do you fear?" "Mrs. Dalsinet went out early in the evening."

"Yes."

"She has not returned; I fear some evil has befallen her."

Tom knew something of the lady's habits, and did not indulge the same fear. He merely said:

"I reckon you will find her at home in the morning. Good-night. I will call and see you to-morrow, after you have called again to see Mrs. Dean."

The detective walked away, but the woman followed him, and said:

"Come what may, I will not deceive you again. I am anxious that you should meet Mrs. Dalsinet; I will do all I can to bring about a meeting."

"Very good!"

"You're an officer?"

"I am."

"Lie in wait for her here. If she does not return by daylight come and report to me, and together we may find her."

"I will do as you recommend, madame."

Mrs. Simonet went away, and our hero did lay low on the lookout, and he had been on the watch but a few moments when he saw a figure stealing down the street. One glance was sufficient, and our hero muttered:

"At last!"

The figure was that of a female. She carried in her hand a small satchel. She proceeded direct to the house where Tom had seen Mrs. Simonet go, and she also rang the bell, and when the door was opened she passed in. A moment Tom waited, and then muttered:

"Now is my time. I will just go straight to gain my last link."

The detective walked several times around the house. It was a small two-story detached building, and there was a portico running across the front of the house. It was after midnight. As Tom stood there watching he saw a light appear in one of the rooms, as he had seen it appear earlier in the evening in the house to which he had tracked Mrs. Simonet. It was also in the front of the house. The detective took in all the bearings, and at length he muttered:

"I can do it."

He walked over toward the house, when he made the startling discovery that he was being watched by a man. The detective turned and walked down the street, and he discovered that the man was following him.

"Well," muttered our hero, "here's a go! Who in thunder is this fellow?"

Tom walked toward the river—walked beyond the point where there were any houses—and then he came to a halt, and waited for the man to approach him. The man advanced right forward, and boldly confronted the detective, and the latter said:

"Halloo! old fellow; good-evening."

"Good-evening," came the answer.

"You are following me."

"Am I?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

Tom suddenly drew his lantern, and strangely enough the other man also drew one, and the two masks were drawn, and the two flashes of light were thrown across each other as the two men glared into each other's face, and that there came a sudden recognition.

"Halloo! Smed, is that you?"

"Halloo! Tom, is that you?" came the answering query in a tone of equal surprise.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OUR hero, as his flash-light radiated the face of the man who had been following him, recognized a sort of independent detective, whose name was Smedley, and who went by the sobriquet of Smed. This man Smedley was a shrewd detective, and withal a pretty honorable sort of a man. He had once been on the regular force, but had lost his position because of a habit of getting in debt to his comrades, and indeed every one else with whom he was brought in contact. The man was a stock gambler. He had a craze to make a fortune, and as soon as he got any money in hand he went to Wall Street; and he had never been known to really make a dollar, yet the fascination clung to him, and his honestly earned money departed from

him and swelled the coffers of the hungry brokers.

For a moment after their mutual recognition, the two detectives just laughed, and Smed finally exclaimed:

"Well, Tom, this is a go!"

"Yes, you bet."

"What 'lay' are you on?"

"Old man," said our hero, "I must first learn what 'lay' you are on."

"Possibly we are on the same 'lay.'"

"From opposite quarters," answered our hero.

"Very possibly."

"Well, come, old man, we must fix this up, and I'll tell you something, Smed. You shall not lose a dollar if it becomes necessary for me to spoil your play."

"There isn't a great deal in it for me as it stands, old man."

"There is not?"

"No."

"So much the better. There may be plenty in it for you in case you can be of any use to me."

"Possibly I can, Tom."

"All right; what is your game?"

"I am employed to run down a man's wife."

"What is the man's name?"

"Well, he tried to work a false name on me. He calls himself Freeman, but his name is Dalsinet."

"Just as I thought," said our hero. "And did you succeed?"

"Yes, I have run the woman down. Are you on the same 'lay'?"

"I think I am. And you ran the lady down?"

"Yes, I did."

"And did you give your information to your employer?"

"Yes, I did."

Tom was thoughtful a moment, and then asked:

"Do you expect him around here to-night?"

"Dalsinet?"

"Yes."

"Between you and me, it's just possible he has been around here. I am afraid the man intends to give me a 'bilk.' I was on the 'lay' for him when I saw you."

"Old man, I've a little job on hand, and then I will talk with you. I want you to be around here until I show up."

"Where will you be?"

"Right here."

"You're going into that house?"

Smed indicated the little frame house into which our hero had seen the woman go whom he had been watching.

"Yes, I go in there," said our hero.

"Suppose my man shows up while you are in there?"

"Hold him."

"Outside here?"

"Yes."

"Shall I signal?"

"Yes."

"And you will let me into this business?"

"Yes, as soon as I rejoin you."

"Go it, old man! I'm with you every time, and I do hope my man will show up. I may teach him a new 'rig,' eh?"

"We shall see. And now you 'lay low' and watch, and give me the call if anything unusual occurs."

"You can depend upon me."

"All right."

Tom Silver went back to the little frame house. He could see in the window, as the lights were still burning, and he discerned that the occupant of the room was walking to and fro, as though very restless and in distress.

The detective went to one side of the portico, and like a cat climbed one of the columns and then crept over the roof until he was under one of the windows. He reached up and glanced into the room, and met a sight that was very gratifying to him under all the circumstances. A moment he lay still and considered, and then remembering a certain fact, he gently tapped on the window. There came no cry of alarm, but the occupant of the room came to the window and raised it, when Tom rose up before her and said:

"Do not be afraid, I am a friend."

To his surprise he received the startling answer:

"So you have tracked me at last."

"Will you let me come into the room?"

"Yes, come in."

Tom entered the room and closed the window

after him. He seated himself in a chair and said:

"Sit down, Miss Tabor."

The lovely girl obeyed, and asked:

"Why have you followed me up?"

Our hero was surprised that the girl should know him.

"I have had most excellent reasons for following you up, Miss Tabor."

"You have been employed by Mr. Baker?"

Our hero started.

"Ah, you need not be surprised, sir. I have recognized you under every disguise you have assumed."

Our hero was still more amazed, and he said:

"Miss Tabor, this is all very remarkable."

"Yes, it is all very remarkable; but I trust you are a good-hearted man."

"I am."

"So I have judged you from the start. And now, sir, you have found me, what do you propose to do?"

The lady spoke with a coolness and nerve that were simply startling under all the circumstances.

"What shall I do?" demanded our hero.

"Can I hope that you will be guided by me?"

"Yes."

"Then I will ask a special favor. You will go away and forget that you ever saw me."

"Yours is a strange request under all the circumstances."

"I am in great trouble, but I am innocent."

"You are in great trouble?"

"Yes."

"But you are innocent?"

"I am."

"Innocent of what, Miss Tabor?"

"I did not take that man's bonds."

"Suppose we admit that fact?"

"Then why should you follow me?"

"Why did you run away, Miss Tabor?"

"I can not answer your question."

"You can not answer my question?" repeated Tom.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I can not explain my reason."

"Miss Tabor, I will admit that you did not take the bonds, and I suppose you are aware that they have been returned."

"Yes."

Our hero smiled and said:

"That admission means a great deal."

The lady colored.

"Yes, miss," continued our hero, "it means that, although you may not know anything about their removal, you certainly know something about their restoration."

"Why should I, sir?"

"Miss Tabor, you can look upon me as a friend."

"Why should I, sir?"

"Because I am your friend."

"You are?"

"I am."

"And you are employed to hunt me down?"

"Mr. Baker is your friend."

"He is my friend?"

"Yes."

"And yet he has employed you to hunt me down?"

"And in all this he has acted in a spirit of real friendliness. He is a noble man. Listen: he was led from the start to suspect you as the thief, and yet you will remember he did not have you arrested."

"Why did he suspect me?"

"Because all the circumstances pointed toward you as the guilty party."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A STRANGE gleam came into the eyes of the beautiful girl. Tom Silver thought her at the moment one of the most beautiful girls he had ever seen. Her trouble, anxiety, and embarrassment made her countenance even more interesting than if it had rested under more placid thoughts.

"All the circumstances point toward me as the guilty party?" she repeated.

"Yes."

"I do not see why they should."

"They do."

"You are a detective?"

"I am."

"I knew you were a detective when you came to the house as the professor. I knew you were watching me."

"And you are innocent?"

"I am innocent."

"Miss Tabor, I believe you—but you know the guilty party. In order to absolutely absolve yourself you will be compelled to incriminate another."

"That is true."

"Why do you hesitate?"

"I have promised not to do so."

"You need not keep your promise."

"I am bound to keep it."

"I will tell you something: no harm will come to the real culprit."

"I must keep my promise."

"Miss Tabor, you may as well tell me all."

"Tell you all?"

"Yes."

"What shall I tell you?"

"All the facts."

"I can tell you nothing."

"I will aid you, miss. I know more than you dream. I know the identity of the real culprit."

"You do?"

"I do."

"Then if you do why have you not ere this exonerated me?"

The detective gave a start.

"Would you have me to do so?"

"Certainly; and it is no more than just and right that you do so."

Our hero was amazed.

"Do you really mean what you say, miss?"

"I do."

"If you are so ready to have the culprit exposed, why have you not denounced the guilty person yourself?"

"Because I am under a promise."

"And save for that promise you would like to have the guilty party exposed?"

"Yes, I would, sir."

"I am amazed."

"I do not know why you should be."

"You do not?"

"No."

"Miss, I will speak plainly: although you are not the guilty party you are implicated."

"I am implicated?"

"Yes."

"I am not."

"But I have the evidence. Yes, I have the most positive evidence you are seeking to shield another. No danger threatens the party whom you would shield. You may as well tell the truth."

"I am absolutely innocent—innoent in fact and of implication."

"This is certainly a very remarkable statement."

"It is the truth. Yes, sir, I would be glad if the guilty party were exposed, and yet I dare not speak, simply because I have promised not to do so."

Our hero was more and more amazed.

"Miss," he said, "I am sorely perplexed."

"Well, sir, you need not be. You are a man of discernment and honor. I am in great trouble—a trouble that is not concerned in the matter of Mr. Baker's bonds at all. It was not because of the loss of those bonds that I escaped from his house."

"And yet the circumstances still point toward you as the original thief. When I exonerate you it is because of reasoning in my own mind."

"You are a man of such keen discernment, I wonder you have never suspected the real truth concerning that robbery. Had you done so, you could easily have cleared up the mystery."

"I have cleared up the mystery as concerns the bonds."

"Then why do you still pursue me?"

"Because you are implicated."

"If you know the real facts concerning the robbery, why do you still persist in accusing me of being implicated?"

"Shall I speak plainly?"

"Yes."

"Miss Tabor, the robbery was committed by a visitor to you."

When the detective uttered the words above recorded, there came a wild look of terror to the beautiful face of Ruth Tabor, and in a wailing voice she exclaimed:

"Has that man dared to lie in this way?"

The detective was taken all aback; but he demanded:

"Do you allude to Mr. Baker?"

"No."

"To whom?"

"The wretch who to shield himself has made the accusation."

The words went clean through our hero, and in his mind he repeated:

"The wretch who to shield himself has made the accusation."

The detective fell to the fact that he had come upon a fresh mystery.

"Miss Tabor," he said, "we will better understand each other if you come to a full explanation."

"Tell me first, has that man dared to make such an accusation?"

"What man, Miss Tabor?"

"John."

"By ginger!" was the mental exclamation of our hero.

John was the name of Mr. Baker's valet—a faithful servitor, who, in his master's mind, was above suspicion. A new light began to break into our hero's mind, and after a moment he said:

"John has not actually made a confession in words, but he has tacitly permitted the terrible accusation to rest."

"I had his promise—"

The beautiful girl did not finish the sentence, and our hero urged:

"Proceed, Miss Tabor."

"I can say no more until I know how far I have been released from a promise."

"I will tell you one fact: the circumstances now all point to your visitor as the guilty party."

"Let me ask you one question. Did John tell of my visitor?"

The question was a "poser" to the detective, and he evaded a direct answer, and said:

"Miss Tabor, we are going to have a full explanation, but the opening disclosures must come from you; then I will make some startling statements, and I will lead you and your visitor out of a great trouble."

There came the question in a husky voice:

"Do you know the identity of my visitor?"

CHAPTER XL

"I CAN NOT answer your question at present," said our hero in reply to the interrogatory of Miss Tabor as recorded at the close of our preceding chapter.

"This is all very strange," said Ruth, "and I do not know what to do."

"There are no reasons why you should not confide in me."

"You admit you are a detective?"

"I do."

"And you ask me to confide in you?"

"I do."

"As I place myself in your power?"

"Yes, that is what I ask, and you will never regret having placed yourself in my power. As far as information and explanations are concerned, I am your friend."

"My friend?"

"Yes."

"Why should you claim to be my friend?"

"Because I believe you are an innocent woman. I believe you are shielding another at your own cost."

"But I have made a promise."

"Miss Tabor, you made a promise in order to shield a guilty party from the consequences of his act. Now I promise you that I will hold your secret, and no immediate consequences shall follow any disclosure you may make."

"I will tell the truth," suddenly exclaimed Ruth.

"Yes; it is better that you confide in me."

"I believe you are an honorable man."

"I am, and more than that, I am really your friend. My employment by Mr. Baker really ended when the bonds were returned, but in conducting that matter I was led into other developments, and I became deeply interested in you. I felt I could do you a service."

"Did Mr. Baker think I was the thief?"

"He did think so."

"And what has led him to change his opinion?"

"Your simple denial," answered our hero.

"He has accepted my simple denial?"

"Yes; and I ask you to confide in me."

"I will."

"Do so."

"I feel that the moment has arrived when I am absolved from my promise. It was John who took the bonds."

"Mr. Baker's valet?"

"Yes."

"How do you know it was John?"

"The night the bonds were taken I saw John put something into the glass of water which Mr. Baker is in the habit of drinking the last thing every night before retiring. At the moment I had no suspicion; but later on, as I thought the

matter over, a dark suspicion entered my mind. I determined to watch. It was after midnight when I saw John enter Mr. Baker's room. I saw him go to Mr. Baker's pocket and get the safe-key; I saw him open the safe; I saw him take the bundle of bonds; and when he came forth I confronted him, and he made me promise not to betray him."

"And you promised?"

"I did; but not until he promised to restore the stolen goods."

"And he did promise to restore them?"

"Yes—as I told him if they were not returned I should reveal all I knew."

"Now, then, Miss Tabor, how is it John was able to force you to make such a promise?"

"He was in possession of a fact that he could betray concerning me."

"He knew that a gentleman had visited you in your rooms?"

"Yes."

"Miss Tabor, who was the gentleman who visited you?"

"I can not tell you. I have revealed all that I feel called upon to state."

"Was that gentleman a man named Dalsinet?"

Miss Tabor uttered a cry of surprise. For a moment her agitation was extreme; but at length, in an agitated voice, she asked:

"What do you know of this man Dalsinet?"

"I know more of him than you do."

"You know more of him than I do?"

"Yes; he is a villain. And now answer me,

is he your husband?"

Miss Tabor did not answer.

"Will you answer me?"

"I can not."

"You will not deny then that he is your husband?"

"Oh, sir, do not ask me more."

"Miss Tabor, I know he is not your husband. And now where is your sister, his reputed wife?"

Again a cry fell from Miss Tabor's lips.

"You see," said our hero, "I know your secret."

"What do you know?"

The detective proceeded and related how step by step he had added link by link to the chain of evidence he was forging, and when he had told this part of his story he said further:

"Your sister is an heiress. I know how it was this man Dalsinet sought to make her his wife. I do not know how it was he succeeded in inducing her to marry him."

"My sister never did marry him."

"I am prepared to believe that you tell the truth. Now tell me about yourself; tell me your history."

"I will confide all to you," said Ruth.

"Yes, miss, do so, and I promise in return to straighten everything out."

"And my sister is really an heiress?"

"Yes, your sister is an heiress, and Mr. Baker holds her estate, and, upon proper proof, is prepared to put her in possession. Tell me the history of your sister and yourself."

"My story is a simple one up to the time that my sister returned to America, fleeing from this man Dalsinet."

"Tell me all the facts."

"My father was a southern man. He had a step-brother named Barker; the step brothers were enemies. My father died when my sister and I were about ten years of age, before his death my father told us we had an uncle in California. He said that he had received a letter from his brother, and that he had every reason to believe that this uncle would make my sister and myself his heirs. A few months later my father died; my sister and I were adopted by a gentleman and his wife, and we were both taken to a distant state, and we were finely educated in order that we might be prepared to earn our own living as teachers. Our adopted parents died, and my sister and I were thrown upon our own resources. I came to New York and secured a position as governess, and finally I entered the service of Mr. Baker. My sister, meantime, had secured a similar position with a family that was going to Europe. When my sister reached Paris she renewed her studies, and indulged no other hope than to return home some day and open a school with me. It was about this time that the man Dalsinet met my sister. He represented himself as a lawyer, and told her the story of the fortune that had been bequeathed to her, and with the facts that had been revealed by our father previous to his death this man managed to impress my sister with belief in the truth of his statements. He visited her often, and made it appear that great

secrecy was required. Finally he induced her to meet him one night, and then he proposed that she become his wife. He professed a mad passion for her. My sister recoiled in horror. The man became furious, and finally proclaimed that she should marry him whether she desired to or not. He held her a prisoner, sent for a clergyman, and a marriage was performed, my sister all the time protesting; but later on a hope entered her mind. She suddenly appeared to accept the situation, and the villain gloated over his triumph. My sister watched an opportunity, secured a weapon, stabbed the man and fled from the house. She has been a fugitive ever since. She supposed for a long time that the man was dead and that she was a murderess, but one day she received news that he was living—that he had come to America and determined to have her acknowledge him as her husband, or he would denounce her as an attempted assassin."

CHAPTER XL

THE detective listened with the most rapt attention to the really startling and dramatic narrative related by Miss Tabor. The affair had in the end assumed a more tragic phase than he had anticipated, and he recognized what a terrible hold the man Dalsinet would have upon the beautiful woman whom he claimed as his wife.

"Yours is a strange and startling narrative," said Tom.

"Yes; and it is a wonder that my poor sister has not been driven to madness."

"She is your twin sister?"

"No, she is two years older than I; but the resemblance between us is very remarkable—we would be taken for twins."

"This accounts for the fact that you are not made a joint heiress."

"Yes; I suppose the fortune was left to my father's eldest child."

"Indeed the testator so intended to leave the money. It is possible he did not know your father had two children. But now, Miss Tabor, we must decide upon our course of action. Where is your sister?"

"I do not know where she is."

"You are not deceiving me now?"

"I am not. I came here to night expecting to find my sister."

"Were you living here together?"

"Yes, since my disappearance from Mr. Baker's house."

"Permit me to tell that you have no closer friend than Mr. Baker."

"He is a noble man."

As Ruth spoke there came a lighting up in her eyes that was very pleasing to our hero.

"And you really do not know where your sister is?"

"I do not."

"Are you not worried?"

"I am almost distracted."

"I will find your sister, and I will also settle with this man Dalsinet. You need not fear for the end. I will go away now; but if your sister returns hold her here until I can see and talk with her. Your sister and I have met before."

"I know that."

"She told you about her interview with me?"

"She did."

"I wish I had met your sister sooner; but all is well that ends well, and I will see that your sister is not only put in possession of her fortune, but that she is relieved forever from the persecutions of this man Dalsinet. She is not his wife—she never has been, and the only matter to settle is the assault."

"But we must find my sister."

"We will do that."

"I greatly fear."

"What do you fear?"

"I fear some evil has befallen her."

"You need not fear. I reckon I can account for her absence."

"What do you suspect?"

"I will not tell you now; but in good time I will explain to you. We do not know, my dear young lady, what a day may bring forth. I desire that for the present, at least until you hear from me again, that you remain here. Do not go forth. But you will be safe. I will place a guardian over this house until I am ready to come and claim you, and possibly I may come in company with your sister."

The detective left the house by the way he had gained entrance, and a few moments later

he had been joined by Smedley. To the latter our hero gave his instructions, and said:

"Smed, old man, heed my orders, and I will see that you make it a good night's work."

"You can depend upon me."

"All right."

Upon the morning following the incident we have recorded, Mr. Baker called upon our hero. There was a smile upon the detective's face.

"Well, sir," said the latter, addressing Mr. Baker, "how do you feel now?"

"I feel that you have some news for me."

"I have great news for you!"

"Proceed; I am almost wild to hear it."

"I have found Miss Tabor."

"You have found Ruth?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"Well, it is enough to know that she is alive, is it not?"

"No; I must go to her."

"You go to her?"

"Yes."

"Not yet."

"Why not?"

"She knows that you suspected her."

A shadow rested upon Mr. Baker's face. "Did you not tell her that I was convinced of her innocence?"

"I did; I told her that you were convinced of it upon her simple asseveration."

"And what did she say?"

"She appeared greatly pleased."

"And she is innocent?"

"A purer or more noble and self-denying woman never lived!"

"Thank you a thousand times!"

"I believed her innocent, Mr. Baker, from the start—at no time did I suspect her."

"I knew that."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"How did you happen to know it?"

"You betrayed it every time you spoke of her."

"Well, let me tell you now her vindication is absolute."

"One word more."

Mr. Baker hesitated, and our hero added:

"Well?"

"Is she a married woman?"

"No."

"Who was her visitor?"

"Oh! you are sure there was a gentleman in her room?"

"I have the most positive proof."

"Who told you?"

"I have the most positive proof."

"Did your man John tell you?"

"Why do you ask that question?"

"A great deal depends upon your answer."

"How?"

"I will explain when I have received your answer."

Mr. Baker was thoughtful a moment, but at length said:

"I suppose I can tell you."

"Yes, you can tell me."

"John was my informant."

"What proof had he?"

"He saw the man."

"He did?"

"Yes; and Miss Tabor made him promise to conceal the fact."

"But he failed to keep his promise."

"He did; but he felt it his duty to tell me."

"I am glad he felt it his duty to tell you. Yes, sir, I am very glad."

"Why, sir, are you glad?"

"Because it permits me to do my duty, and tell what I know about this rascal John."

CHAPTER XLIII.

It was Mr. Baker's turn to look amazed as our hero uttered the words recorded at the close of our preceding chapter, and after a moment he demanded:

"What do you mean, Mr. Silver?"

"I mean just what I say. I am glad that fellow felt it his duty to inform you about the man who was in Miss Tabor's room."

"Your words are very strange."

"You think that man John the pink of honor?"

"He is a true and worthy man."

"You think so?"

"I do."

The detective smiled, and there came an incredulous look to his face.

"If any one has slandered John," exclaimed Mr. Baker, "they do not know the man."

"I knew you felt that way, Mr. Baker, and that is why, when I was first called into the case, I did at once express my suspicions. I thought I would wait until I had the most positive proof."

"There is a deep suggestion in your words, sir."

"Yes, there is not only a suggestion but insinuation."

"Will you speak plainly?"

"I will. But first let me ask why you have such wonderful confidence in John?"

"He has served me many years."

"And you have trusted him implicitly?"

"I have."

"Well, sir, when I was first called into this case, and had listened to your story, I made up my mind that John was the thief."

"Sir!" ejaculated Mr. Baker.

"I repeat, from the start I made up my mind that John was the thief, and now I have the most absolute proof that he was the thief. I will tell you further that the solution of the mystery of the robbery never did bother me much; it was the other mystery I was anxious to solve."

"And you tell me that John was the thief?"

"Yes, sir."

"I can not believe it; I will not believe it!"

"You say, sir, you will not believe it? But that does not alter the facts. It was John who stole the bonds."

"Poor fellow! If your statements are true—"

"My statements are true."

"Ah! then the mystery of their return is accounted for, sir."

"Yes, the mystery of their return is accounted for indeed. The rascal knew he was discovered, and promised to return them, but only because he knew he was detected."

"You must explain all this to me."

"I will, sir. He was seen to take those bonds, and undoubtedly he went deliberately to work to steal them. He drugged you the night of the robbery."

"Drugged me?"

"Yes, sir; and took the key from your pocket, opened the safe, and took the bonds, and an inmate of your house saw him."

"An inmate of my house saw him?" repeated Mr. Baker.

"Yes, sir."

"Who saw the man take the bonds?"

"Miss Tabor."

Mr. Baker did indeed look dumfounded, and our hero related all the facts, and then added:

"I would not have been at liberty to tell you these facts had not the scoundrel first broken his own promise."

"I can not believe him guilty."

"I demand that you permit me to prove it in my own way."

"What will you do?"

"Miss Tabor must be vindicated."

"If she positively declares what you have repeated, I am prepared to accept her word."

"But this will not satisfy me, sir."

Mr. Baker looked white and haggard as he said:

"I am sorry to hear this of John, but more sorry to learn that Miss Tabor really did have a male visitor in her room."

The detective laughed and said:

"We will go into that matter after we are through with John."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Go to your house and compel John to confess."

"I am willing to believe his guilt."

"That will not do for me, sir. We detectives always desire absolute proof, and although I believe Miss Tabor's story, I desire to verify it, and the verification will lead to other developments, I am sure."

The two gentlemen proceeded to Mr. Baker's house, and John was summoned to the library, where he met the detective alone.

"Good-morning, John."

The man turned very pale, and in a trembling voice answered the salutation.

"John," said our hero, "I am very sorry for you, but when you returned the package of bonds you failed to restore them all. Two thousand dollars are missing."

John's face became like that of a dead man, and, caught unawares, he exclaimed:

"I thought I returned them all, sir. I did not mean to keep any."

"John, I shall have to place you under arrest."

"Arrest, sir?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, sir, spare me! Does my master know?"

"Your master knows all."

"Let me speak to him."

"Do you desire to speak to him?"

"I do, sir."

Our hero had not anticipated such an immediate breaking down. He summoned Mr. Baker, and when the latter entered the room our hero said:

"John wishes to say something to you before going to jail."

"Yes, Mr. Baker," cried John, "I do."

"Speak, John."

"Mr. Baker," said the man, "I really did not know what I was doing when I yielded to temptation, and you can believe me, sir, when you know I returned the bonds, and if some of them are missing I do not know where they are. I did not mean to keep a single dollar."

"You were really the thief, John?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you not act like a man and confess at once?"

"I did not think, sir, I would ever be discovered."

"You might have known you would be discovered."

"I am glad now, sir, it is all known."

"You are really glad?"

"I am, sir."

"Well, John," said our hero, "we have found the missing bonds—I will tell you that since you have made such an open confession, and now it remains with your master to say whether or not you shall go to jail."

"Oh, Mr. Baker, spare me!"

"You may go now, John, and I will talk with you later on."

The man stole from the room, and our hero said:

"Well, sir, that part of it is settled."

"Indeed I am rejoiced; but my rejoicing is marred in learning that John was the real thief. And you really suspected him from the first?"

"I did, sir."

"What grounds had you for your suspicion?"

"Merely the fact that at no time did I believe Miss Tabor guilty."

"This is grand, her vindication."

"Yes, and it is complete."

"And now, how about the party in her room?"

"There was no man in her room."

"Did John lie to me?"

"No, not altogether."

"You must remember I had positive proof—the testimony of my own observation."

"I know that."

"And yet you claim she can be vindicated?"

"Yes."

"She did have a visitor?"

"Yes."

"Was it her brother?"

"No."

"Who?"

"Can you not guess?"

"I can not."

"Some day I will tell you."

"Tell me now."

"Later on."

"Tell me now, sir."

"I have something more important to tell you."

"Proceed."

"The man Bentley lives."

"He lives?"

"Yes."

"This is great news, indeed."

"Yes, it is great news; but more startling revelations are to come, Mr. Baker."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE whole interview between our hero and Mr. Baker had been a remarkable one, and it became still more deeply interesting when Tom told the story of Bentley. He told it, however, permitting the impression to prevail that Ruth Tabor was the heiress. He did not tell the story of Marie Tabor. He only told of the treachery of Bentley, and when he had concluded Mr. Baker said:

"As soon as the proofs are furnished, I am prepared to turn over the whole fortune."

"All the proofs can be furnished. I have all the papers in my possession, and the provisions made by your father."

"The moment I am satisfied I will be only too glad to make good the wrong that has been done. And now, sir, tell me the truth."

"I have told you the truth."

"Yes; as far as you have gone; but you have not told me all the facts, now, I see."
 "What do you discern now?"
 "I have established in my own mind the identity of the party who was in Miss Tabor's room."
 The detective smiled and said:
 "Well, let me know your conclusion."
 "It was her husband."
 "You are pretty cute after all," said our hero.
 "Yes, sir; but the discovery, as you can understand, brings me much disappointment."
 "Baker, you are a pretty good fellow."
 "Thank you."
 "I have refrained from telling you who the party really was. I prefer that as John has made a confession, that Miss Tabor be granted the same privilege."
 "What do you mean?"
 "I want you to go with me and meet Ruth."
 "I will not go."
 "But you must go."
 "No, sir."
 "You forget the question of the fortune."
 "That can be settled through my attorneys."
 "As a rule I have advised you well?"
 "Yes, sir, you have."
 "I now advise you to visit Miss Tabor."
 "When?"
 "Now."
 "I will go."
 "Good!"
 The two men left the house, and our hero led the way to the vicinity of the house where Ruth was stopping.
 "You will remain here while I prepare Miss Tabor to see you."
 Mr. Baker was very nervous and excited, but he said:
 "I am following your directions implicitly."
 "Good! I will come for you."
 Tom proceeded to the house, and giving the name he had been directed to mention at the door, he was admitted, and a few moments later found himself in the presence of Ruth Tabor. The lovely girl wore an anxious look.
 "You have passed a bad night, Miss Tabor," said Tom.
 "Yes, sir, a night of agony."
 "You fear for your sister?"
 "I do."
 "You need not; all will come out right in the end. I desire that you receive a visitor."
 "Mr. Baker?"
 "Yes."
 "I can't do it, sir."
 "But you must."
 "On no account whatever!"
 "To oblige me?"
 "I can not."
 "One moment—let me tell you he knows now of your innocence. John has confessed."
 "John has confessed?"
 "Yes."
 "You have betrayed me."
 "No, miss, I have not, and to this moment John does not know that you told me the true facts of the robbery."
 "Then how did he come to confess?"
 "I forced him to it."
 "I am glad."
 "Yes, it is better; but let me tell you something: John did not keep his promise with you."
 Miss Tabor blushed to the temples.
 "He betrayed me?"
 "He did; and Mr. Baker at this moment believes you were secretly receiving a stranger in your room—a gentleman."
 Miss Tabor's face assumed a look of deep distress, and the detective continued:
 "I brought Mr. Baker here that you might in your own manner explain the truth to him."
 "And tell him of my sister?"
 "Yes, tell him the whole story. He is a man of honor, a true gentleman, one of the most amiable and honorable men I ever had business connections with, and I am as anxious as yourself that he should hear the whole story."
 "Why did you not tell him?"
 "I thought it better that it should come from you."
 "I wish you had told him all."
 "Believe me, it is better that you should tell him."
 "Does he suspect the truth?"
 "No."
 "What does he suspect?"
 "He believes at this moment that you are a married woman."
 Again the lovely girl blushed.
 "And you mean that I shall tell him all?"
 "Yes."

"About my sister?"
 "Yes; everything."
 "Her marriage?"
 "Yes."
 "It may endanger her."
 "We will secure a friend."
 "This is a severe task you impose on me."
 "But Mr. Baker may have something to tell on his part. One thing is certain: he will restore your sister's fortune."
 "If he is to receive all this information, I prefer that you communicate it, sir."
 "No; I insist that you see him."
 "Here?"
 "Yes, here and now."
 "I am in your hands. I am convinced that you are my friend. I will do as you direct. But, oh, sir, my sister—what has become of her?"
 "As soon as this matter with Mr. Baker is over I have a proposition to make. There is no doubt in my mind that I will not find your sister all right. I have a plan to carry out. I desire to settle with this man Dalsinet. I have quite a scheme."
 "Mr. Silver, you are so good and wise a man I am prepared to act entirely as you advise."
 "Very good. I will go and bring Mr. Baker here; and now, remember, I desire that you tell him all that you have stated to me, and more, if there is anything you have held back."
 The detective left the room, and a moment later he came to where he had left Mr. Baker, and said:
 "You are now to hear a most wonderful revelation, sir."

CHAPTER XLIV.

MR. BAKER became considerably agitated when he heard the detective's declaration, and he said:
 "I am half inclined to go and meet her."
 Tom laughed, and said:
 "I will not have any of that, for she was more than half inclined not to receive you."
 The two men proceeded to the house, and Ruth Tabor and her late employer stood once more face to face. The embarrassment was great on both sides, but the girl did look wondrously beautiful, her very embarrassment really heightening her beauty. After a minute or two Mr. Baker's embarrassment wore off. He was really a very generous man, and he said:
 "Miss Tabor, very strange incidents have attended our acquaintance."
 "You mean, sir, my employment by you?"
 Here the detective had his say:
 "I will leave you now. Yes," he added, "I will go away, but in one hour I will return, and then I hope it will be all right."
 The detective flashed a meaning glance on both, and left the room. Upon being left alone with each other the embarrassment appeared to return, but again Mr. Baker was the first to speak, and his words were indeed very abrupt, and to his listener very startling, as he demanded:
 "Miss Tabor, is there any reason why I should not love you and ask you to become my wife?"
 The beautiful girl was taken all aback, as the saying goes. She was undoubtedly unprepared for this sudden revelation. She did not answer the important question; and Mr. Baker repeated it, and then there followed a moment's silence, and the gentleman said:
 "I am at least entitled to an answer."
 There was a sad look in his eyes and sadness in his tones as he spoke.
 "There is a reason why you should not love me and why you should not ask me to become your wife," at length answered Ruth, in a low tone.
 Again there followed a moment's silence, and the look of sadness and disappointment deepened upon the gentleman's face. Still, after a moment he asked:
 "Would it be unfair for me to ask the reason?"
 "No."
 "Will you tell me?"
 "Do you really love me, Mr. Baker?"
 "I do."
 "And do you really desire that I should become your wife?"
 "I do."
 It was funny, but the girl who had just told her visitor that there was a reason why he should not ask her to become his wife had really forced him to both confessions. She had really forced him to ask her to become his wife. She appeared to appreciate the situation, and she blushed.

"I have been unfair," she said.
 "No, I am glad you have given me the privilege to tell you I love you, and now there is no reason why you should not tell me what barrier intervenes."
 "Mr. Baker, the shadow of a deep disgrace overhangs me."
 Mr. Baker turned very pale, and in a husky voice asked:
 "Have you once been a wife?"
 The girl started, and quickly exclaimed:
 "No."
 There followed a very awkward silence, and the look of disappointment upon Mr. Baker's face was supplemented by an expression of intense anguish. Ruth observed the changing expressions upon his face, and said:
 "The disgrace does not directly rest upon me."
 Mr. Baker looked perplexed.
 "Will you explain?"
 "Oh, sir, let it go upon this statement: I am of obscure origin; my walk in life has been among the lowly; I am a wage-earner while you are a born gentleman."
 "Ruth, this last fact, if true, would not weigh with me. I'd ask you to be my wife if you were from the humblest walks of life. I do not love you for your position, but for yourself."
 "And you really love me?"
 "I do."
 "And you really desire that I become your wife?"
 "I do."
 "Sir, you are so frank and open that I must tell you all. John told you that I had a secret visitor while I was an inmate of your house?"
 "He did."
 "Has any one told you of the identity of that visitor?"
 "No one has told me."
 Mr. Baker spoke in trembling tones. It was evident he feared some terrible revelation.
 "I did have a visitor, sir, and the circumstances were such that I did not feel at liberty to confide in you."
 "I wish you had, Ruth."
 "The visitor was my sister."
 "Your sister?" ejaculated Mr. Baker.
 "Yes."
 "I was informed your visitor was a gentleman."
 "My sister came disguised as a man."
 "Why should she have come in disguise?"
 "She is before the law a criminal."
 "A criminal?"
 "Yes, and that is why I can not become your wife. I am the sister of a fugitive criminal."
 "Ruth, you are not in any way involved in her guilt."
 "I was not a participator, but its consequences fall upon me."
 "Suppose the circumstances were different?"
 "What do you mean, sir?"
 "Suppose you were really at liberty to listen to my proposal?"
 Ruth blushed to the temples, but did not answer.
 "Ruth," said Mr. Baker, "it may be that you can not become my wife; but I have been perfectly frank with you; I have confessed my love; I am at least entitled to know if, under different conditions, you could love me."
 The girl did not answer.
 "Come, Ruth, I am entitled to an answer."
 "I believe you are a very noble and generous man."
 "You do not answer my question."
 "I have never loved another."
 "You do not answer my question."
 "I can say no more," said Ruth.
 "And what can I draw from your words?"
 "You are at liberty to draw any conclusion you please."
 "I can?"
 "Yes, sir."
 "Ruth, suppose I should say that I am led to believe that, under other conditions, you might love me?"
 The girl remained silent.
 "You said I could draw any conclusion I pleased?"
 "I did."
 "I draw the conclusion just stated."
 Ruth remained silent, and there came a happy look to Mr. Baker's really handsome face.
 "My dear Ruth," he said, "I desire that you tell me your story?"
 "My story?"
 "Yes."
 "What story—"

"The story of your sister's crime."
 "My sister is not really a criminal, but under the law she must appear as one."
 "Tell me all the facts?"
 "Mr. Baker, I have a favor to ask: please do not press me."
 "I must press to a full statement, Ruth."
 "You are unfair."
 "I am?"
 "Yes."
 "You are taking an advantage of my really forced admissions."
 "And I propose to do so fair or unfair. I desire that you tell me about your sister."
 "Has not Mr. Silver told you the facts?"
 "No."
 "Not even partially?"
 "No, he did not even tell me that you had a sister."
 "I will give him permission to tell you all."
 "I prefer to listen to the narrative from your lips."
 "Oh, sir, spare me!"
 "Ruth, I must be cruel to be merciful."
 "And you insist?"
 "Yes, I insist. You must tell me the story with your own lips."
 "Then I will," came the answer.

CHAPTER XLV.

RUTH did tell her story. She told everything, and Mr. Baker listened with deep attention, and when she had concluded he said:
 "And all this constitutes the barrier to your loving me?"
 "Yes, sir."
 A grand smile lighted up Mr. Baker's face as he said:
 "Ruth, you have demonstrated just why you should become my wife."
 "Oh, sir, hush!"
 "You shall become my wife! You love me, I love you."
 "Oh, sir!"
 "Ruth, Ruth, confess that you love me!"
 "In the disgrace of my position?"
 "Nonsense, child! There is no disgrace. Your sister did right. She has committed no crime. She was fighting for her life and liberty. Any good, brave woman would have done the same under similar conditions. Ruth, confess that you could learn to love me. You need a protector; your sister needs a friend. Come, my dearest, speak!"
 "You are truly a noble man!"
 "Let me not hear of that. Can you learn to love me?"
 "I do love—"
 We stop here, and so did the two lovers, and at that critical and interesting moment the detective entered the room. He saw happiness written upon both faces, and he said:
 "I reckon it's all right."
 "Please go away now, Mr. Baker," said Ruth.
 "Why should I go?"
 "I desire to talk to Mr. Silver."
 "Talk to him; let me hear what you say."
 "Have you news of my sister, sir?"
 "I will find your sister."
 "Ah! sir, you are hopeful, but I fear."
 "You need not fear."
 Mr. Baker at this moment interjected:
 "You may trust Mr. Silver when he tells you not to fear. You may take his word. He always knows what he is talking about. He was your friend and champion from the first. I almost wonder you did not fall in love with him."
 It was a rash speech, but Tom only laughed, and exclaimed:
 "Now I see how it is. Well, it is all right."
 "I'll bet a great sum, Ruth, that he knows just where your sister is at this moment. It is his way to be very mysterious until the last moment. During all these days of agony that I have endured he knew all the time that the mysterious visitor to my house was your sister, but he would not say one word."
 "I beg your pardon, during all those days it was merely a suspicion."
 "You knew the truth to-day?"
 "I did."
 "And still you would not tell me."
 "You got the facts at first hand, did you not?"
 "I did."
 "Let us talk plainly. Is Miss Tabor to become your wife?"
 Ruth blushed, but Mr. Tabor answered:
 "I trust Miss Tabor will soon become my wife."

"Are you agreed, Miss Tabor?" asked Tom. The lady did not answer.
 "Come, miss, answer me."
 "My sister shall answer for me."
 "Skillfully put, Miss Tabor; but that will not do. You can aid your sister as Mrs. Baker far better than you can as Miss Tabor."
 Both Mr. Baker and Ruth stared in amazement, and Mr. Baker asked:
 "What is your plan?"
 "I'll tell you. I desire that you and Miss Tabor get married at once."
 There fell a silence.
 "Neither of you will ever regret the act."
 "I am willing," said Mr. Baker.
 "I can not consent!" exclaimed Ruth.
 "Why not?" asked Tom.
 "I must first know concerning my sister."
 "Have you perfect faith in me, Miss Tabor?"
 "In your honor and wonderful discernment—yes."
 "And my truthfulness?"
 "Yes."
 "Enough! I tell you now your sister is safe."
 "Where is she?"
 "She is safe."
 "But where is she? Take me to her!"
 "I can tell you no more. I can not take you to her, but I repeat she is safe, and you will do her a great service by immediately becoming this gentleman's wife."
 "Yours is a very strange statement."
 "I know it; and my life is spent in making strange statements. But what I tell you now is true; I have a plan."
 "Will you reveal your plan?"
 "I desire to settle this fellow Dalsinet. Listen: I do not fear him. I would have your sister meet him in a minute from now, as far as any fear is concerned."
 "And what do you fear?"
 "A public scandal. I desire to settle this matter quietly. I desire to force this fellow to a full confession. I can do it with your aid after you are Mrs. Baker."
 "Indeed you make a strange condition."
 "There is no reason why you should not become this gentleman's wife. He loves you, and you love him."
 "How do you know?" came the prompt query.

"Ah, I have eyes. I am used to reading facts that need not be spoken. Come, Miss Tabor, you can do yourself a great honor, your sister a great service, and make one man the happiest husband on earth."
 "When would you have us marry?" demanded Mr. Baker.
 "In about five minutes," came the answer.
 All three laughed, and even Mr. Baker was compelled to say:
 "Is not the time fixed rather soon?"
 "Bosh! It is time that happiness should follow all the suffering that has ensued during the past few weeks, and more than any one else Miss Marie Tabor is entitled to a little rest and peace."
 Ruth's eyes filled with tears as she said:
 "You are a very remarkable man, Mr. Silver. No other man could convince me of the necessity of consenting; but as you claim it tends to make my sister happy—to bring her rest and comfort—I consent. I do so trusting in the blindest manner to your words."
 "You will never regret your decision," said Tom.
 "Amen!" echoed Mr. Baker.

CHAPTER XLVI.

TOM SILVER had most excellent reasons for advising an immediate wedding. In the first place, he was fully satisfied in his own mind that Ruth really loved Mr. Baker, and he believed even more strongly in Mr. Baker's love for the beautiful girl. There was no reason why they should not marry. Mr. Baker was a young widower; he was wealthy, a perfect gentleman, and an honorable man.
 Tom had trusted in his success, and he said:
 "The ceremony shall take place at once."
 Ruth protested, but Tom persisted. He said he had a clergyman at hand, and the matter of preparation was all humbug.
 "Give me at least three days," pleaded Ruth.
 "That will spoil all my plans. Miss Tabor, listen. I will speak plainly. This is a right and proper marriage. You and Mr. Baker are well worthy of each other. There is no reason why you should not become husband and wife. Your immediate marriage, as I have said, favors my plans."

The detective at length prevailed so far that it was agreed that the marriage should take place on the following day.
 "I will leave you together to make your arrangements," said Tom. "You must be married, go away for three days only, and then return and take up your abode in your own home."
 The detective also spoke of Mrs. Simonet, and it was agreed that he should send that lady to the room, and she was to act as her services were needed.
 Having made all arrangements and given all instructions, our hero departed. He had big business on hand. He had got upon a trail and he was pretty sure that within a few hours he would have definite news for Ruth.
 To Mrs. Simonet the detective explained his plans so far as it was necessary, and that lady proceeded at once to join Ruth and Mr. Baker, and when the latter left his affianced Mrs. Simonet accompanied him.
 We will here say that our hero had made all necessary inquiries concerning Mrs. Simonet, and had satisfied himself that she was entitled to trust and confidence.
 The detective an hour later met the man Smedley, and the two started off together. They spent a long time traversing the streets and entering numerous well-known resorts, and at length Smedley entered a certain place, and coming forth met our hero, who had waited outside, and said:
 "I've got on to him."
 "He is inside?"
 "Yes; and I am satisfied he is waiting to meet some one."
 "Who?"
 "Well, I should not be surprised if he were waiting for Dalsinet."
 "Did he see you?"
 "No."
 "You are sure?"
 "Yes; and what is more, I am satisfied we are on the right trail."
 "All right; you just lay around and I will run the game now."
 The detective walked away and entered a saloon near by, and a few moments later a very dilapidated individual came forth from the saloon mentioned, and this dilapidated-looking character walked up to where Smedley was standing, and to the latter he said:
 "Halloo, boss!"
 "Well, what do you want?"
 "Give us a dime."
 "You go to thunder!"
 The dilapidated-looking fellow laughed.
 "Come, move on; don't stand there staring at me," said Smedley, in an angry tone.
 "I guess I'll do," comes the remark from the dilapidated-looking fellow.
 "Eh?" ejaculated Smedley.
 "I guess I'll do."
 "Hang me for a blind shrimp swimming right into a net in clear water, but you have done it well!"
 Again the dilapidated-looking man laughed.
 "Tom, you're a dandy!" said Smedley.
 "It's all right, then?"
 "Hang it! when you can blind me just after talking to me, I reckon you'll pass anywhere."
 "I guess so. And now you keep out of sight."
 "Oh, I am under cover for Dalsinet."
 "Is that so?"
 "Yes; and by thunder! see there, it's lucky, for there goes your man!"
 Tom looked in the direction indicated, and there, sure enough, stood Dalsinet, and the man was gazing at the entrance to the resort into which Smedley had gone some few moments previously.
 "I was right," said Smedley.
 "You were."
 "It's an interview."
 "It is."
 "We can see what it means."
 "Well, what does it mean?"
 "Hadley has got a secret to sell."
 "And Dalsinet is to be the purchaser?"
 "Yes."
 "I can get the secret for a less price."
 "I reckon so."
 "I'll try it."
 "Go, old man. We're on the right track, dead sure!"
 A few moments passed, and Dalsinet crossed the street and entered the resort on which his glances had been directed.
 "There he goes," said Smedley.

"Yes, and here I go; and now, old fellow, 'lay low.' We've got 'em, dead sure!"

Tom walked toward the place he had seen Dalsinet enter, and a moment later he also sauntered into the place.

It was a low bar-room—one of the meanest and—in the rear room sat several men, and at a table was seated a man whom our hero recognized. The latter went to the bar, and Dalsinet also stood at the bar taking a glass of ginger ale. Tom did not call for ginger ale; his game necessitated different refreshment. As Dalsinet stood drinking his ale, he looked around the room, and the detective saw him make a certain sign, and the next moment the man Hadley came forward.

"This is Mr. Jones?" said Hadley, in a low tone.

"Yes."
"I have been waiting for you a long time."
"I was delayed."

"All right, sir. Are you here to talk business?"

"I am."
The detective could overhear every word that was spoken, although the two men spoke in low tones.

"It's all right," said Hadley.
"How is it all right?"

"We've got the 'kitten.'"

There came a gleam to Tom Silver's eyes, and in his mind he said: "I'll have that 'kitten' within a few hours."

"What proposition have you to make?"

"I reckon you have heard our terms."

"Can we not go somewhere else and talk?"

"We can talk here and talk quick. I can name our terms."

"Do so."

"Two thousand cash down."

"But what guarantee have I that you will keep faith?"

"If you will have the money ready you can pay cash on delivery."

"I'll do it," came the answer.

CHAPTER XLVII.

TOM SILVER just chuckled within himself. He understood just what the words meant, as they fell from the lips of the man Hadley.

"The money will be all ready, but I must make arrangements to receive the 'kitten.'"

"You can do that, but you must act quickly."

"Why?"

"Can't you 'tumble'?"

"No."

"The 'kitten' will be missed; there will follow inquiry and search; we may find it hard to keep the cage door closed."

"My arrangements can be made by to-night."

"At what hour will you be ready?"

"Before midnight."

"And you will have the money ready?"

"I will."

"There's one thing I want you to understand, old man: there must be no funny business."

"I do not really understand you."

"I'll explain: You may seek to evade payment of the money; if you do your game is up—that is all. We've tumbled to something."

"The money will be paid—but to what have you tumbled?"

"There's a big man on the lookout for this 'kitten.'"

Dalsinet gave a start and turned pale.

"Who is the big man?"

"We have not seen him yet; we are satisfied to deal with you, but if you attempt to go back on us we will deal with the other man—we will look him up."

"I will not go back on you."

"We're giving you a big chance. We're asking nothing in advance; but it must be cash down."

"It shall be."

"And when am I to see you again?"

"To-night."

"Where?"

"Here."

"At what hour?"

"Nine o'clock."

"And then?"

"I will conclude all arrangements."

"All right; I will meet you here at nine o'clock."

Dalsinet left the saloon, and Hadley took another drink, and with a smile on his face, went back toward the rear room, where his name was called by a man who had just entered the place. Hadley turned, and the two men were

soon standing in front of the bar. The newcomer said:

"Your man was here?"

"Yes, and it's all right."

"All right?" repeated the man.

"Yes."

"How all right?"

"He will pay cash down."

"How much?"

"Two thousand. He made no demur about it."

"Well, it's not all right."

"Why not?"

"I've another scheme. We've got a puzzle, and we didn't know it!"

"How so?"

"There will be big money offered for information concerning the 'kitten' in a few days."

"But I've made an arrangement with this man."

"I don't care about your arrangement. When are you to see him again?"

"To-night."

"Where?"

"Here."

"At what hour?"

"Nine o'clock."

"All right. We will meet him."

"We had better let well enough alone."

"I know my business. We're on to a good thing. We'll go slow."

Our hero overheard every word that was spoken, and there was a pleased smile playing around his face.

The two men held some further talk and separated, and Hadley crossed the room, and sitting down in a chair, commenced mumbling to himself. Our hero overheard a word here and there and reached the conclusion that Hadley was not altogether pleased with the turn of affairs.

In the meantime the day passed. Our hero had left the saloon and rejoined Smedley, and the two men had been on the "lay" for several hours. It was just after dark when Hadley came forth from the saloon. He started along the street, and our hero and Smedley struck upon his track. Hadley proceeded to a house in the lower part of the city, located in a quarter where there were many factories and warehouses and few dwelling-houses. Upon reaching the house indicated, Hadley entered with a night-key, and the two detectives held a moment's consultation.

"Here we have it," remarked Tom.

"Yes, sir; we are on the spot now, sure!"

"One word, Smed."

"A dozen if you choose."

"How is it these men got possession of the girl?"

"I've been revolving that in my mind."

"And you have reached a conclusion?"

"Yes."

"Let me hear it."

"I held several interviews with Dalsinet. It is evident he had previously seen this fellow Hadley, and those fellows got the facts out of him. Hadley must have got on to my clues—how, I don't know. They must have laid for the lady, and they 'nipped' her between meals."

"It was your game to capture her?"

"No, I had only to 'spot' her residence."

"Had you made any report to Dalsinet?"

"No."

"Then those fellows must have 'moused' you around, Smed?"

"That's it, I reckon."

"I thought you were smarter."

"So did I, my lord."

The two men made certain arrangements as to signals and the like, and then our hero walked down to a point opposite the house he had seen Hadley enter. He took all the bearings, and then crossing to the house, descended to the deep area-way, and in a few moments managed to gain an entrance. As he walked into the lower basement hall he was greeted with damp air, and drawing his mask-light he fished its rays around, and saw that the basement part of the house was not in use. He ascended to the parlor floor and saw that the house was but meagerly furnished. There were no carpets on the floors, and only a table and a few chairs, a cook-stove, a few pieces of crockery, and some pans and kettles were in the room. There were empty bottles in plenty, a pack of cards, and indeed many signs testifying to the fact that the place was a sort of bunk-house for a lot of bad men.

The detective ascended to the second floor. The rooms contained several cots and some very

dirty bed-clothing. Tom only wanted a glance, and then ascended to the third floor. Thus far he had not seen a soul, nor had he heard any voices, but as he reached the third hall the sound of voices fell on his ear.

"Ah! he muttered, 'here we have it.'"

The detective crept forward to the door and peeped in through the key-hole, and a sight met his gaze that caused his heart to swell with anger. On a cot, with her hands and feet tied, lay a beautiful girl. Her face was livid with an expression of suffering and terror. A gag had evidently just been removed from her mouth, and she spoke with a great deal of difficulty. As the detective bent his ear to the key-hole it was the man Hadley who was speaking; the fellow said:

"It will be all right in a few hours, madame."

"Oh, sir!" appended the girl, "if you have any pity in your heart, take me from this place!"

"Yes, we will, to-night."

"And where will you take me?"

"You've had a talk with my pard?"

"I did talk with my other abductor."

"And what did you say to him?"

"I can not tell you."

"Why not?"

"He made me promise not to do so."

"See here, madame, you had better trust me. Tell me what you told him; it may be much better for you."

"He said he would tell you."

"Well, he did tell me some, but not all."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE suffering girl appeared to think a moment, and then said:

"There is some one who is urging you on in this matter."

"Certainly! I will admit that."

"It is a man?"

"Yes."

"And his name is Dalsinet?"

"Well, we don't call him by that name; but I reckon that is his name."

The lady described the man.

"Yes, that is the man," came the answer.

"And he is to pay you money?"

"Yes."

"If you will take me from here the day will come when I can pay you double the sum you will receive from that man."

"See here, madame, you must have some friends. Send me to them, and if they will pay me more money than this man whom you call Dalsinet has promised, I will treat with them."

"Do you know you committed a crime when you abducted me?"

"Yes, certainly; I've been committing crimes all my life—that don't weigh. Now you must talk quick, as I have an appointment."

"I have nothing to say. I have made an appeal to your heart, to your honor—I can do no more, but I do say that the day will come, and possibly it is not far distant, when you will regret your crime."

"It's money that buys houses—I've nothing to do with morality. I am not a bad-hearted man, and when all things are even I'd rather follow the moral course. I'll admit that, because it's safer, but with me it's a question of money. If your friends can put up you are all right. Give me their names and addresses and I'll work an interview with them, otherwise I'll have to play out the deck I'm dealing."

"I have no friends to whom I can send you. I may have some day, if you will only trust me and wait."

"My capital is not large enough to do a credit business. This man offers cash."

"Let me say one word?"

"Go ahead!"

"You will be my murderer."

"Well, I don't like that view of it, but I can't help it; it's business with me—pure business, and you must work in and break the chances; you've been treated well."

"Do you call it good treatment to kidnap a defenseless woman—to bind her hand and foot and hold her a gagged prisoner?"

"That comes from necessity—that's all. You've been well fed. I've spent the last nickel to buy you delicacies the little time you've been here, and everything has been cooked to the queen's taste. I'm sorry for you; I've no feeling against you—it's merely a question of money. Now see here: I'll have to divide with my pard; he's set to go back on me. I believe, and I'll make you a dead square proposition: we are to receive two thousand dollars for handing you over; I will only get half that sum, and

"Some one who will pay me a thousand dollars and I will break the deal and take the run out from a new pack."

"I can send you to no one," came the answer, in tones of deepest anguish.

"I am sorry, madame, for I think the man who put up the job on you is a mean scamp. Is he your guardian?"

"No."

"What claim has he upon you?"

"No claim."

"He seems mighty anxious to secure possession of you?"

"He is a wicked man."

"We're all wicked, madame. I'm sorry—hang it! if you could only send me to some one who would make any kind of offer for compensation for my trouble."

"One moment. You know the house where I was lodging?"

"Yes."

"Go there and ask for a lady named Simonet."

"Well?"

"When you find her bring her here, and something may be done."

"I'll do it, madame, yes, I'll do it, honor bright. Now you rest easy and I'll bring the woman here—yes, I will, and we'll talk the matter over. Now cheer up; it may be all right for you yet; and I'd like to 'bilk' my pard, for I believe he intended to go back on me."

The man started to restore the gag, and the woman pleaded:

"Please spare me the suffering!"

"Does it hurt?"

"Yes."

"But you will scream."

"No. I promise to remain quiet until you return."

"You promise on your honor?"

"I do."

"I'll take chances. Hang it! I hope the woman you send me for may be able to compensate me—yes, I do."

The man left the room and descended to the lower floor. Our hero had overheard every word, and he had preceded the fellow downstairs, and he "lay low" and heard the man go into the rear room on the first floor, and a moment later a gleam of light shot from the room, and then the detective stepped forward. Our hero was still disguised as the "bummer." The moment Hadley's eyes fell upon the miserable apparition that stood in the door-way he exclaimed:

"Hallo! where did you come from?"

The detective pointed toward the door.

"Come, speak!"

"From below," said Tom.

"Who are you?"

"Billy."

"You're Billy, eh?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

Hadley glared and then his face assumed a look of anger as he exclaimed:

"Look here, Billy, no fooling with me!"

The detective stepped into the room and moved toward the man Hadley. The latter quickly drew a pistol, but he never used it. He received a blow from a wooden "billy" that knocked him to the floor all in a heap. A curse fell from the man's lips as the detective the next moment kicked the pistol from the fellow's grasp. Hadley for the moment had appeared to forget that he held a pistol.

"Don't move," said Tom.

"Who are you, anyhow?"

"Your game is up, old man! It's my deal now. Get up and don't act foolish, or you're a dead man."

"What's your deal?"

"It's against you!"

"Who are you?"

"I'm Silver Tom, old fellow."

The man Hadley gave a start. He had particular reasons for recollecting our hero, and the little suggestion will, to a certain extent, explain Tom's quiet satisfaction when he was listening to Hadley's talk with Dalsinet.

"I knew you were some one," said Hadley. Oh, did you?"

"Yes."

"What led you to think so?"

"I thought so while I was going to the floor quick."

"You laughed, and said:

"Hadley, you are not altogether as bad as some fellows. You're bad enough to be hung; but you've got one good quality—you're free to talk right up square at times."

"Yes, I am."

"Now, I want you to talk right up square with me."

"I'll do it," came the answer.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"How did you come to get possession of the lady upstairs?"

"You know all about that lady?"

"Yes."

"And she was the magnet to draw you here?"

"Yes."

"Are you interested in that lady?"

"Yes."

"Is there any money in it?"

"In what?"

"A clean own up."

"No."

"Thank you."

"Your game is up, Hadley. That man, in the first place, hasn't got one cent; then again, I'm on to you. So you might as well make a clean breast of it."

"Will you believe me if I give it out?"

"That depends upon you. Give it."

"I met this man accidentally. He was coming out of Smedley's office. I got on to him and got his romance out of him, then I made him think I could do his business. He fell into my arms and confessed all, as the good mother said; then I got onto Smed, followed him up, and when he struck the abode I was on to it. I lay low, and the girl came out while Smed was at his dinner. I was primed for the job; ran her into a carriage, and brought her down here; went into negotiations, and now the jig's up and I'm out the pile."

"That's so; but you may make a few dollars, old man."

"How?"

"You are to meet your employer to-night?"

"Yes."

"At nine?"

"Yes."

"Go and meet him, tell him you've raised your price, and that you've made up your mind that you want part of the money in advance first so that you can see its color, and then report back to me."

"How about my 'pard'?"

"Tell him the truth?"

"Can he come in?"

"No."

"He may throw me."

"If you meet him after you have met Dalsinet it won't make any difference. He can't throw you. If you meet him say nothing."

"All right! I'm in a square game now. It don't fit me well, but I'll go through."

"Hold your man until ten o'clock."

"I'll be late."

"That will do; and now I'll let you into my scheme."

The detective held a long consultation with Hadley, and when he had opened up the game Hadley exclaimed:

"You've got a good scheme."

"Will you work it?"

"I will."

"You agree to do it?"

"I do."

"Then mark my words: if you carry it through all right you shall receive a thousand, and you haven't asked a cent."

"That's good. I'll just work 'em good; I begin to think the scheme fits me better."

"All right! You go."

Having arranged his plans, Tom Silver ascended the stairs, and as he did so he felt like a conqueror. He had indeed run his game, link by link, and he had extended the links clear forward to success. There was a strange feeling in Tom's heart as he opened the door of the room where Marie Tabor lay a suffering prisoner. He stepped into the room and the sufferer fixed her eyes upon him.

"You do not remember me," said Tom.

The girl merely nodded her head.

"You do not recognize me?"

Again the girl merely nodded her head.

"I see you do not recognize me."

"Who are you?"

"I'm an angel."

A look of terror came to the girl's face.

"You don't believe that, do you?"

Still the girl gazed and remained silent.

"You have suffered a great deal, but it's all right now. I tell you, I'm an angel. I don't look like one, but I am your good angel, at least."

There suddenly came a bright look to the prisoner's eyes.

"You are an angel!" she asked.

"Yes; but I don't look like one, do I?"

"No."

"Appearances are deceiving."

"It's true."

"What can I do for you?"

"Prove you are my good angel."

"How can I?"

"Free me from these bonds."

"I'll do it."

Tom stepped across the room, and in less time than it takes to tell it he freed the prisoner, and the latter was so surprised she could only gaze in amazement.

"What next can I do?" demanded Tom.

The freed girl was speechless with astonishment; but suddenly a suspicion appeared to run through her mind.

"Who sent you here?" she asked.

"I came. I am your good angel."

"Will you speak plainly?"

"What shall I say?"

"Why did you free me?"

"Because you asked me to do so."

"If I make another request, will you grant it?"

"Yes."

"Take me from this place."

"I will. Come."

"Can you do so?"

"Certainly!"

"You do not fear?"

"Whom should I fear?"

"The men who brought me here."

"They fear me—you need not fear."

"And you will take me from here?"

"I will."

"Where will you take me?"

"To any place you name."

"You are not deceiving me?"

"I am not."

"And you are really my friend?"

"I am your good angel."

"What have I done to win your good offices?"

"You are in trouble—that is enough."

"And I am really to be taken from here?"

"We will go at any moment."

"We will go now?"

"Now it is; but wait!"

"Ah, I feared you would relent."

"You do not recognize me?"

"I do not."

"I'm a hard-looking fellow?"

"For an angel—yes," came the answer.

It was a strange answer under all the circumstances.

Tom received it with a laugh, and he said:

"Angels ought to have the power to transform. Shall I?"

There came a strange look in the girl's eyes, and she asked:

"Have we ever met before?"

"Look and see," said Tom.

Even as our hero spoke he worked one of his wonderful transforms, and he looked within the minute about as he did upon the night when he held a certain eventful interview described in the earlier chapters of our narrative.

CHAPTER L.

The moment the beautiful girl beheld the detective under the change in his appearance, a cry escaped her lips.

"You recognize me?"

"You are Silver Tom?"

The detective nodded.

"You are the man a veiled lady once consulted with."

"I am the man."

"And you are my friend?"

"I am."

"This is wonderful!"

"It is strange," said Tom; "but I have stranger revelations to make."

"And you will really take me from this place?"

"Certainly I will."

"At once?"

"Yes."

"Where will you take me?"

"I will take you to a place of safety, and we will talk matters over. I have many questions to ask and I have much to tell you. Afterward we will decide upon our course. I will leave the room a moment. When you are ready to start signal and I will be at hand."

A few moments had passed after Tom had left the room and then the door opened. Mark Tabor appeared in her street attire. Naturally, her mantle and bonnet had been left close at hand.

The two left the house, and Tom led the fair girl to his own lodgings. On the way little was said, but when once within his own office and after his charge had rested a few moments, Tom said:

"Now, then, there must be a free and frank talk between us. I desire to ask you a number of questions. You must answer me frankly; and also, you must be patient until such time as I see fit to open up the whole truth to you."

"I have perfect confidence in you, sir."

"Thank you—and my first question is: How does it occur that you have such perfect confidence in me?"

"I once casually made the acquaintance of a woman for whom I had performed a kindness. I desired to ask some questions, and I inquired of her concerning a lawyer, and at the moment you happened to pass along. Our conversation occurred upon the street. As you passed, the woman said: 'There goes one of the kindest men in New York. He is a detective.' The moment she mentioned the word 'detective,' a new idea came into my mind; I asked her more particularly about you, and she related to me an experience she had in which you figured. On the strength of what she told me I made other inquiries, and finally sought you, and then followed the interview we had that night."

The detective listened with a great deal of interest, and when his charge had finished, he said: "What led you to make those inquiries about me?"

"I can not answer that question."

"Why not?"

"An answer would lead to other questions."

"It was agreed that you should answer me frankly."

"But the matter upon which I questioned you that night is very indefinite."

"I know it. And now listen to me: I know just where your fortune is located."

"You know just where my fortune is located?"

"Yes; in fact, I know much of your history. I am a friend of your sister."

"You are a friend of my sister Ruth?" came the exclamation.

"Yes, I am your sister's friend."

Marie looked amazed, but suddenly she exclaimed:

"I see it all!"

"Well?"

"You are the detective who was employed to solve the mystery of the safe robbery."

"You are right."

"My sister is innocent."

"I have established her innocence."

"You have really established her innocence?"

"I have; and your sister looks upon me as her friend."

"Where is my sister?"

"She is safe. We will talk about her later on. Now you can trust me; you can tell me all."

"What shall I tell you?"

"Tell me how you happened to know that you were a possible heiress?"

Marie proceeded and told the story of her acquaintance with the man Dalsinet, and how he had pretended to be her husband. She said the marriage was never a legal one. She had never made any responses, and besides, she did not believe the man who pretended to be a clergyman really was so. She told of her escape, and indeed acquainted our hero with every incident—how she escaped to New York and found her sister, and now having seen a certain paper in Dalsinet's possession she had been led to believe that the man who held her fortune lived in New York.

"Had you any positive information as to that man's identity?"

"I did not, but I had a suspicion."

"Whom did you suspect?"

"Mr. Baker."

"And you had an idea of gaining possession of your fortune without resorting to a legal method?"

"Such a wild idea did once enter my head."

"One night you were in the vicinity of Mr. Baker's house?"

"Yes."

"And a man touched you on the shoulder?"

"Yes."

"You threw powder in his eyes?"

"I did; I always went prepared for self-protection."

"Did you know at the time that I was your victim?"

"I did not."

"And did you really have an idea of taking possession of property belonging to Mr. Baker?"

"Not until I was fully convinced that he held property belonging to me."

"Did you let your sister into your scheme?"

"I did not."

The detective from this point proceeded and told Marie all that had occurred from the first moment that he had been called in to solve the mystery of the safe robbery.

Marie listened with distended eyes of wonderment, and when the detective concluded she said:

"And you are really on the track of this man Dalsinet?"

"I am, and I propose to bring the man to an acknowledgment that you are not his wife."

Other explanations followed. All mysteries were cleared up. Our readers have been informed during the progress of our narrative as to certain incidents, and all these were duly explained and made plain between Tom and the beautiful girl with whom he had become acquainted under such strange circumstances.

Our hero explained his plans, and bid Marie remain in the house until the morning, when he would advise further with her.

Marie was put under the care of our hero's landlady, an elderly person who was kind and considerate in disposition and bearing.

"I reckon now the drama draws to a close," said Tom, as he left his house and proceeded to the place where Dalsinet was to meet Hadley. Smedley was on hand, and as he recognized our hero approaching he said:

"He has just gone in there."

Tom took up his position near the place. Half an hour passed, and the man Dalsinet came forth.

"Now is our time," said Tom, and he, with Smedley, approached the villain.

CHAPTER LI.

Laying his hand on Dalsinet's shoulder, our hero said:

"You are my prisoner."

Dalsinet started back, but Tom closed in on him, and quick as a dash slipped the handcuffs on his wrists, and at the same moment he said to Smedley:

"Go and capture the other one."

As Tom spoke Hadley started to come forth from the saloon, and Tom seized him, and as he clapped the irons on him, exclaimed:

"You are my prisoner!"

"Here's a go!" cried Hadley.

Dalsinet was trembling, while Hadley was as cool as a cucumber, and turning to Dalsinet, he exclaimed:

"Boss, I feared it—I told you so! The jig's up, and you and I are safe for Sing Sing for the next twenty years."

Dalsinet found voice to ask:

"On what charge is this arrest made?"

"Abduction," came the answer.

"That man is at the bottom of it all. I am prepared to squeal!" cried Hadley.

Dalsinet was no fool. He saw that the game as it stood was dead against him.

"Can I have a talk with you?" he said, addressing our hero in a low tone.

"What do you wish to talk about? We have the affair dead on you."

"I have a revelation to make that will change the whole aspect of the affair."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"My dear fellow, we have run this thing clear down. The girl has been rescued; there is no hope for you. The other men have all squealed like this man here. You will go up, sure."

"If you will take me somewhere so that we can be alone, I will explain all to you."

"All right; we will go to your lodgings."

Turning to Smedley, Tom said:

"Take your man in. I will bring mine along after I have heard what he has to say."

"Do not take that man in until you hear my explanation."

"Well, you hold him at your office, Smed, until I report to you."

Hadley and the officer walked off in one direction, and our hero proceeded with Dalsinet to the latter's rooms. Once inside, and after the door had been closed, Dalsinet proceeded to explain that the lady whom he had abducted was really his wife.

"Your wife, eh?"

"Yes; and if you will just enter my service, I will furnish you full proofs and pay you a small fortune. Indeed, this affair will terminate in the most satisfactory manner."

"You think it will, eh?"

"Most certainly."

"I know you, Dalsinet," said the detective. The man turned pale, and the detective reached over and whispered a few words in his ear, and the fellow's face assumed a ghastly hue, but in a husky voice he said:

"Even if what you charge is true, it makes no difference; the lady is my legal wife."

The detective related the circumstances of the false marriage, but Dalsinet persisted in claiming it was a regular and legitimate wedding.

The detective drew a written document from his pocket.

"Read that," he said.

Dalsinet took the paper, and with a white face and staring eyes, read it through, and when he had finished, Tom said:

"Sign that!"

"Never! It is a confession."

"Yes, it is a confession—a full confession."

"I will not sign it. You can not bully me into signing a false confession."

"How about this one? Will you sign this?"

The detective handed the man a second paper to read. The latter was a second confession relating how he had made the acquaintance of a gentleman on a steamer going to Liverpool how, after his arrival in Liverpool, he had poisoned the gentleman and then robbed him.

When Dalsinet read the latter confession he fairly groaned, and our hero said:

"You see, Mister Man, we have you dead to rights."

"The whole story is false!"

"Your intended victim lives, I tell you. We have the facts on you dead to rights."

"It's a deep-laid conspiracy!"

"You think so?"

"I do!"

"Cesar Brown, your game is up. I can hang you for a murder committed in Savannah."

The man leaped to his feet, a wild cry fell from his lips, and our hero, who had his eyes fixed on him, said:

"You are a pretty duck to claim any one for your wife!"

"I will sign the first confession if you will let me go free."

Our hero had long indulged a certain suspicion. He was not sure of one fact until the moment he mentioned the name Cesar Brown, and then he knew he was right.

"I don't care about your signing the first confession. I gave you a fair chance and you would not avail yourself of it. You see you can not aid any one by signing any of these confessions. I have the evidence dead on you."

"Let me sign. I will sign them all."

"Very well; it will save trouble."

The detective removed the manacles from the man's wrists in order that he might sign the papers.

"If I sign will you let me go free?"

"No," said our hero.

There followed a moment's silence. The detective produced pen and ink, and all the time kept his eyes on his man. But he was a moment too late. Dalsinet clapped a pistol to his own breast and fired, and at the same instant Smedley opened the door and rushed into the room.

CHAPTER LII.

Smedley had received his instructions, and he had been a listener to all that had occurred between Tom and Dalsinet. Indeed, he had made all the arrangements so he could gain admittance to the house. Tom had arranged his plans to the minutest details.

When Dalsinet shot himself Smedley rushed into the room.

"Did you see him do it?" asked Tom.

"I did."

"You were watching?"

"I was."

Conversation ceased in a few seconds. Tom gave his attention to the dying man. Smedley ran to notify the police and summoned a doctor.

A police sergeant and doctor soon arrived, but the services of the latter were not required. The wicked man was dead.

The officer recognized our hero, and asked:

"How did it happen?"

"The man was a murderer. I have been on his track a long time. I denounced him to his face, naming his real identity, and the fellow shot himself."

"What was his name?"

"Cesar Brown."

"Why, we have an order on our books to look out for this fellow. It's an old order issued fully five years ago."

"Well, there's Caesar, but the order will not harm him now."

The reporters followed the police, and from our hero learned the full particulars.

Tom was very careful not to mention the name of Dalsinet, nor did he give the least hint as to the romance of which the man was a part, or rather, in which he had been an actor.

The police took care of the body. Tom was compelled to go to the station-house, and was paroled by the captain, and as he walked away he muttered:

"Well, this is an ending I did not anticipate; but under all the circumstances it is a fortunate incident for one person. All scandal is avoided, and Marie Tabor need have no further fear. The past will indeed become the past, and it will be buried forever in the grave of that poor wretch. Alas! the way of the transgressor is hard. That fellow was a bad man; it is an advantage to the community at large that he is out of the way. I would have prevented him, however, from killing himself had I gotten on to his design; but after all, possibly it is better as it is even for him. I could not have let that man go free. He was a murderer. I would have been compelled to turn him over to the authorities, and he would have been tried and hanged. There would have been no escape for him."—and then the detective stopped, but resumed—"What a skeleton would have been marched out before the public gaze! Yes, yes, after all, it may all be for the best."

During the time that our hero was indulging the soliloquy we have recorded, he was on his way to his own lodgings, and strange thoughts and aspirations were passing through his mind. On the morning following the incidents we have described, Tom rose early and hastened to the residence of Mr. Baker. He found that gentleman as happy and hopeful as a boy the day before Christmas. To Mr. Baker our hero made certain revelations, and with him made certain arrangements also, and then returned to his own home, and a few moments later he received Marie in his office.

As the fair girl seated herself our hero had an opportunity to study her countenance. The resemblance between the sisters was certainly remarkable, and yet, knowing both, Tom could easily have distinguished them one from the other, and he did think that Marie, after all, was, if possible, a more beautiful girl than Ruth. There was a bright smile upon the detective's face, and Marie proved her quick discernment by exclaiming:

"My friend and benefactor, you appear happy and hopeful this morning."

"I do."

"Can I hope that you have good news for me?"

"Yes, I have good news for you."

"When can I see my sister?"

"I have a revelation to make. This afternoon your sister becomes a bride."

There followed a moment's silence, and then, with a blush, Marie asked:

"Are you to become my brother-in-law?"

Tom laughed right out in a merry way, and answered:

"No; I wish your surmise were true, however."

"So do I," came the frank avowal.

Tom winced; and why should he? Possibly other hopes had arisen in his heart.

"Your sister is to marry Mr. Baker."

Marie sat a few moments lost in silent thought, but at length she asked:

"It is really a love match?"

"It is, beyond question."

"Why do you not take me to my sister?"

"I can do so if you desire it."

"Certainly, I desire it."

"I was about to ask a favor of you. I want to work out a little *dénouement*, and I thought you might aid me."

"I will do anything you desire."

"Certain events have occurred since yesterday that have changed my plans. I will explain more fully at some other time, and I thought I would let matters run along as I had at first intended. I propose that you shall be present at the wedding."

"Then I will see my sister to-day?"

"Yes."

"I am content."

"We have some matters to talk over, and then I have some startling information for you. We have spoken about you being an heiress."

You are indeed an heiress, and, as has been intimated, Mr. Baker is the custodian of your property, which he stands ready to surrender at any moment. I will now show you some papers."

Our hero went over the papers that he had recovered from Dalsinet, and among others was the will.

Marie took a deep interest in reading over all the papers, and when the reading was completed, she said:

"If this restitution is made I am a rich woman?"

"Yes."

"From these papers it appears that I am the only heir?"

"Yes."

"I shall divide with my sister."

"Your sister will be very rich as the wife of Mr. Baker."

"But she will own this amount in her own right."

"The fortune will be your own; of course you can do what you please with it."

"You have spent a great deal of time in behalf of my sister and myself; you have run many risks. You are entitled to your share of this property."

"Hold on!" cried Tom; "I do not want to hear any of that nonsense. Mr. Baker is to settle with me; you owe me nothing."

"I shall divide my fortune with you."

There came an odd look into our hero's eyes as he said:

"We will talk over that part of the affair some other time."

CHAPTER LIII.

MISS TABOR would have urged the matter, but Tom changed the conversation by remarking:

"I have a very important matter to talk with you about. There occurred a tragedy last night—a tragedy that must intimately concern you."

Marie turned pale, and gazed into the detective's eyes.

"This man Dalsinet, do you know that he has been traveling under a false name?"

"I supposed as much."

"His real name was Caesar Brown. He was a fugitive. The man was one of the worst criminals in the country."

In husky tones Marie said:

"You say he was a criminal?"

"Yes."

"One word—" Marie attempted to speak, but her utterance failed for a moment. She managed, however, after an interval to complete the sentence: "Is he dead?"

"Yes, he is dead," came the answer.

There followed a period of silence, and it was Marie who first spoke. She asked:

"Did he die by your hand?"

"No."

Our hero related all the circumstances attending the man's death. Marie listened with breathless attention, and when the account was concluded there again followed an interval of silence, and again it was Marie who first spoke. She said:

"I feel sorry for the miserable man."

"Yes, women like you feel sorry for the wretch who had not one thought of pity for them; but we will not talk of him any more. I look upon his death as a very fortunate incident. Your name has not been associated with his, and it never will be, save as it has been discussed between you and me and your most intimate associates, including Mrs. Simonet and Mr. Baker and your sister. The man will go to his grave and you have no more occasion to think of him than you would of some ruffian who had assailed you upon the street. Before the man killed himself he signed a full and detailed confession. That confession, now that he is dead, can be destroyed, but it vindicates you, and now you have nothing to fear. No one is on your track. You can go abroad openly and without fear, with no one to molest you."

"And all this I owe to you," came the acknowledgment.

Later in the day our hero called again at the house of Mr. Baker.

Ruth Tabor had returned to the house. Mrs. Simonet was there and also an elderly man whom our readers will recognize as Bentley.

Tom was shown into the library, where he met Ruth. The detective was smiling all over, but the young lady looked sad and troubled, and immediately demanded of the detective:

"What news of my sister?"

"Would it be pleasant for you to have your sister present at your wedding?"

"I have notified Mr. Baker that the marriage shall not take place until I have definite news concerning my sister."

"And what did Mr. Baker say?"

"He bid me wait and see you."

"He thought I might persuade you?"

"I will not be persuaded."

"I will not attempt to persuade you, for your sister will be present."

"My sister will be present?" cried Ruth, in a glad tone.

"Yes. Miss Tabor, I have great news for you."

The detective related all that had occurred. Ruth listened with tears of gladness shining in her eyes, and when the startling narrative was completed, she exclaimed:

"You are one of the noblest men on earth!"

"Thank you, miss; but I have simply performed my duty. I will explain that when I urged your marriage I had other intentions concerning this man who claimed to be your sister's husband, but later on I changed my plans; still I did not calculate upon his death. As the marriage has been decided upon, I still think it is better that the ceremony take place."

"Have you told my sister of my approaching marriage?"

"I have."

"And she approves?"

"One moment—I hear a carriage. Yes—it has stopped. It is your sister; let her speak for herself."

A few moments later and our hero led Marie into the library. The two sisters were clasped in each other's arms. The detective left them alone and joined Mr. Baker in the parlor.

Marie had been veiled when she entered the house, and Mr. Baker asked:

"Who is the lady?"

"The heiress," came the answer. "She is here to claim her inheritance."

"She shall have her own with interest," came the reply.

An hour later and the ceremony was performed. Ruth Tabor became Mrs. Augustus Baker. Her sister stood as bride-maid, and the detective, a handsome fellow, served in the rôle of best man, while Mrs. Simonet was the witness.

After the ceremony long explanations followed all round, and then the bride and groom went away, and Marie, aided by Mrs. Simonet, was to keep house during their absence.

In less than a week Mr. and Mrs. Baker returned to their elegant home and Tom Silver received an invitation to dinner. It was a merry party.

After the dinner Mr. Baker summoned our hero into the library, and said:

"It is now time to arrange a settlement with you, sir."

"You mean it is time for me to hand in my bill?"

"Yes."

"I will hand in my bill one year from the day you were married."

Mr. Baker looked puzzled.

"You do not understand?"

"I do not."

"Shall I explain?"

"Yes."

"You will keep my secret?"

"I will."

"I love Marie."

"Does she know it?"

"I think she guesses it."

"Why do you say you will hand in your bill in one year?"

"I trust that upon the anniversary of your wedding mine will take place."

"Old fellow, have you spoken to Marie?"

"No."

"I have one word of encouragement for you."

"Only one?"

"Yes."

"Let me hear it."

"Your marriage to Marie will bring joy to the heart of my wife."

"I am glad to hear it."

"And you expect to be married one year from the twenty-eighth of last month?"

"Yes."

Reader, our tale is told. Tom Silver had indeed worked up the mystery link by link, and the last link was added when, on the twenty-eighth of a certain month the following year, he led the beautiful Marie to the altar.

THE END.

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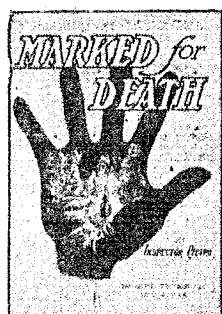


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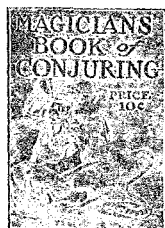
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